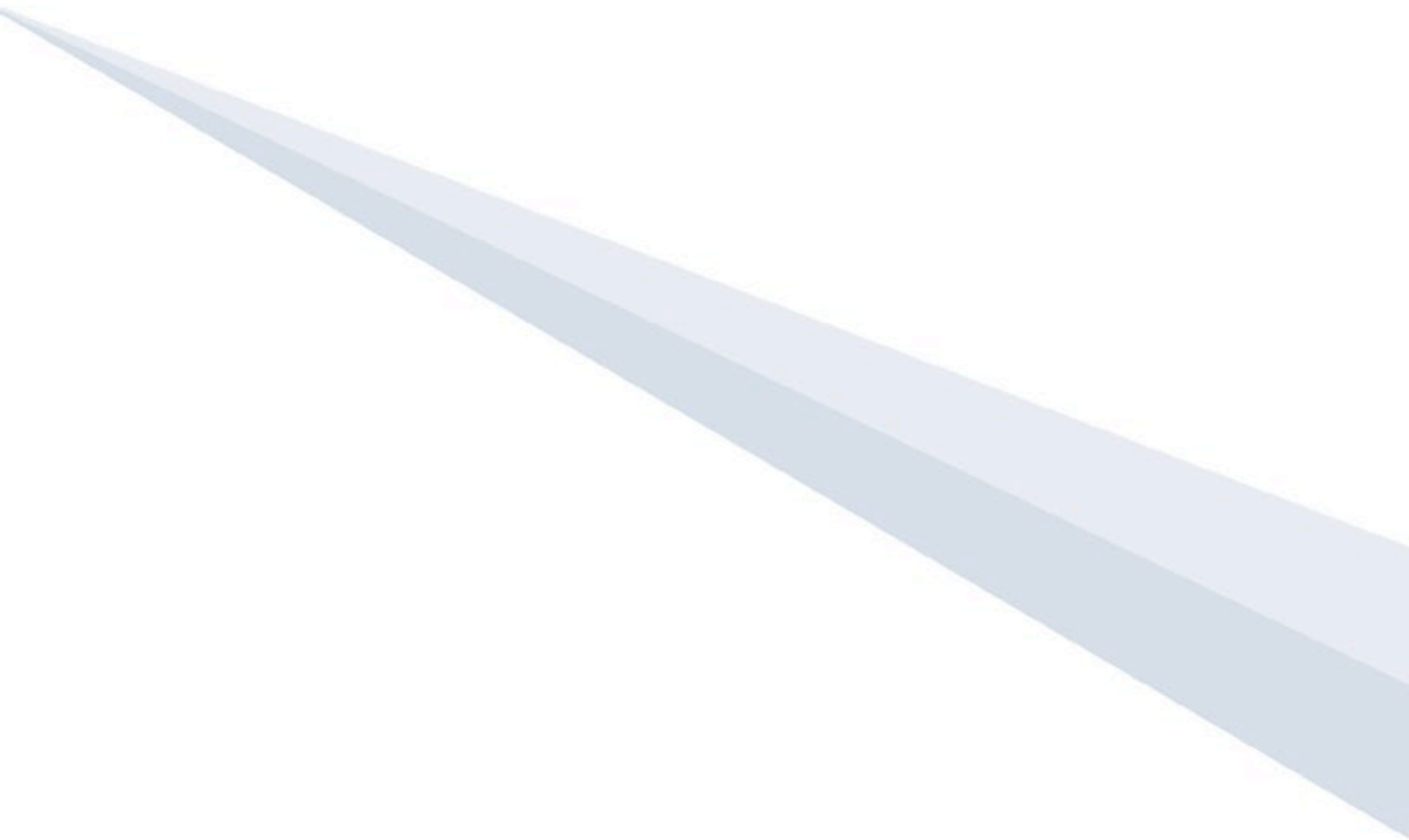


How to Start a Gymnastics Business



**GYMNASTICS
SCHOOL**



— 2015 Edition —

How to Start a Gymnastics Business

by Michael A. Taylor



USA GYMNASTICS.

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DISCLAIMER

This publication is intended for reference information only, and presents tools for consideration in establishing a model of operations and examples of best practice systems. It is not intended to be used as a complete solution to all gymnastics club operations and gymnastics programs, and the use of the information included herein is the choice and responsibility of the user. It is recommended that an attorney be consulted for any matters relating to liability and legal issues, particularly in the use of the sample forms included.

Information provided in this publication has been prepared by the Author and is published by USA Gymnastics as a service to the gymnastics industry. It does not contain all information about all possible business operation issues, nor does contain all information that may be relevant to particular business operation situations. The information provided is of general application, and intended to facilitate communications and discussions between gymnastics professionals, including coaches, teachers, administrative and management staff, accountants, attorneys and other professional advisors. The information cannot be relied upon as a substitute for seeking guidance from appropriate professionals such as accountants, legal counsel and insurance advisors.

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"Best practices" are sometimes defined as a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has been proven to reliably lead to a desired result. "Best practices" evolve over time as improvements are discovered.

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PREFACE

So you think you want to start your own gymnastics business. Congratulations! You have taken an important first step—getting information. USA Gymnastics developed this booklet with two goals in mind—to help you determine if starting a club is the right decision for you, and to improve your chances of success with your new business, or to make your current gymnastics school more successful.

The first section of this book deals with starting your new business and the second part of the book is the details in operating your business. You may feel that there are more questions than answers, but we have tried to highlight the myriad of issues you will face before you even open the doors to your new club, or make your business better. Wherever possible, we have included options for you to consider or provided typical ranges and solutions.

The end of this book includes the appendices that include several resources on a variety of business-related topics. Since so many of the steps involved in opening a gymnastics school are intertwined, we suggest you read through this entire manual first before you get started.

Reading through this booklet and watching the videos is only the first step. If you conclude that you are ready to get started opening your own gymnastics school, you have lots of work to do! And USA Gymnastics is ready to help. Just look at all the resources we have available to club owners on www.usagym.org.

Find out more about

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SECTION ONE

STARTING A NEW BUSINESS



Once upon a time, small business owners were looked upon as non-conformist, idiosyncratic outsiders that couldn't handle the corporate life and "working for a living." Today, entrepreneurs are heroes and role models. Almost everyone wants to own his or her own business – it is the real American dream.

We are in the midst of the largest entrepreneurial surge ever seen. According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), there are 28.2 million small businesses in the U.S. in 2011. The SBA defines a small business as an independent business having fewer than 500 employees. This would include basically all gymnastics businesses. Small business accounted for 63 percent of the net new jobs between 1993 and mid-2013 (or 14.3 million of the 22.9 million net new jobs). About half of all new establishments survive five years or more and about one-third survive 10 years or more. The entrepreneurial rate in the U.S. is already well above the dot.com bubble of 20 years ago, with over 543,000 new businesses getting started each month. Although we have slipped a bit recently from the high point of 320 new entrepreneurs out of 100,000 adults, 65% of the net new jobs come from small business. Becoming your own boss has become a national obsession.

This book is not intended to be the end-all road map for your success as the owner of a gymnastics business. Rather, the goal is to give you some information that will help guide your decisions and planning. These best practices are deliberately presented with the hope that you will continue to educate yourself on how to run a successful organization.

The gymnastics industry has evolved over the years and many great books have been published relating to the sport, but most have focused on athlete training, skill development, coaching principles, and conditioning. There have been a few gymnastics business related books printed, but *How to Start a Gymnastics Business* is intended to establish some standards for successful operation of gymnastics organizations. It is my hope to raise the standard by which gym owners operate their

businesses and conduct their operations. My goal is that the gymnastics industry becomes the benchmark by which other youth sport businesses are judged.

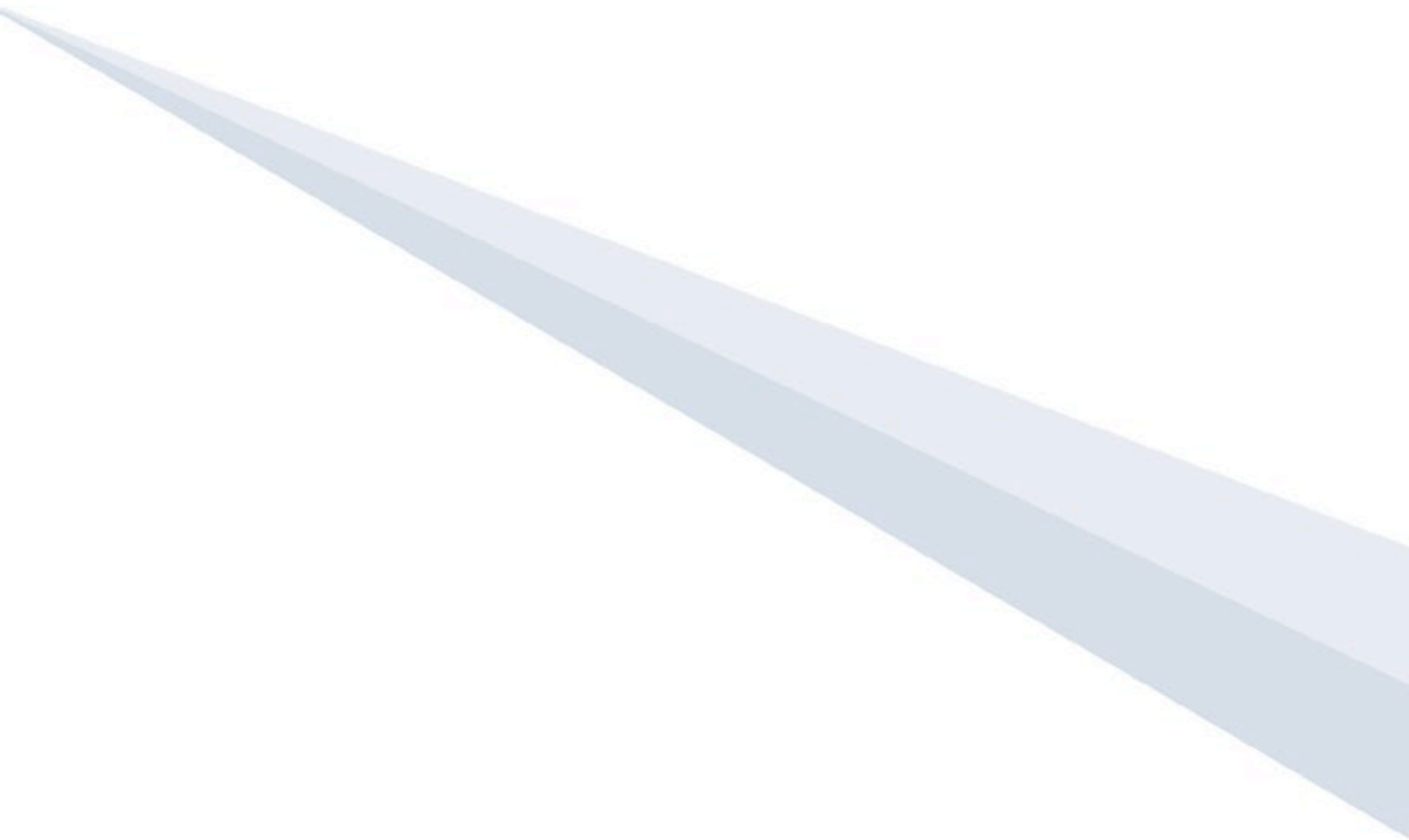
The most difficult task in preparing this guidebook was trying to organize the content in a logical and progressive way that would allow the reader the opportunity to follow along in a sequential order or to pick and choose the content of the most interest. With that, please understand that there is considerable overlap in some of the content, particularly in regard to personnel / human resources (staffing) issues and risk management as well as with customer service and program practices.

If you are looking for ideas in certain areas, look about the manual, if you don't find what you are looking for in the first place you think of...keep looking. With this manuscript, a compilation of articles and information based on common sense, recommendations from various professional organizations, authors and experts, I eagerly share some experience and knowledge in an effort to present "How to Start a Gymnastics Business." Topics will be presented for your consideration, alternative options will be investigated, and some techniques will be given to help organizations improve their operations through best practices of operating policies and procedures, risk management, human resources, business planning, etc.

As solutions are presented to these and other ideas, please understand that this publication is a dynamic work in progress. You are receiving a manual that is currently not fully formatted to address all best practices. This is a "living document" and it is my hope to continue to revise and update this book in the future.

As times change, our responses as business people need to change. There may be no definitive answer to some questions and issues, and in some instances I offer a number of options. Just like in the sport of gymnastics, all we can do is prepare to the best of our ability, try our best when it is time to perform, never give up, and strive to be getting better all the time!





CHAPTER ONE

BUSINESS BASICS



Why do you want to start your own business?

Most gymnastics teachers and coaches do not own a gym. They either teach or coach in someone else's gym or they work within a school, a YMCA, or some other not-for-profit based organization. If your goal is to teach and coach gymnastics, there are thousands of opportunities available to you within the existing gymnastics community. And as we shall see, in many cases you will make more money and have fewer responsibilities if you work for someone else than if you open your own gym.

In view of these sobering facts, it is imperative that you be clear on why you want to open a gymnastics school. In most cases the simple desire to teach and coach gymnastics and the skill set that you have developed as a gymnastics teacher will not be enough to make your dream or owning a gymnastics school a reality...or at least a very pleasant reality.

In most cases the reason to open a gymnastics business is exactly the same as the reason to open any other business. Businesses are formed in order to make a profit. The way you will try make a profit is through opening a gymnastics center, but the goal will be to make a profit.

If this seems harsh or uncaring you need only reflect on the fact that it is very difficult to do a great job teaching gymnastics if you cannot pay the rent, if the gas is disconnected, or if the paychecks do not clear the bank. Trust me, your employees will not settle for the simple job of seeing a child's eyes light up the first time they make a back handspring by themselves. They will also want to get paid.

And of course you will want to get paid as well. After all since it is your gym you are the one who has invested the money, time, and effort into getting the gym business up and running and it is you who has taken all the risk. If anyone deserves to get paid, it is you. And yet the truth is that the owner gets paid last. If there is anything left after all the bills are covered and the employees paid (along with the taxes and benefits), and if sufficient funds have been set aside for upcoming bills and expenses, then and only then, does the owner get compensated for all his or her hard work and investment.

If all of this sounds difficult you are starting to get the idea. It is difficult. There is nothing easy about it. But

it can be rewarding and very, very exciting to watch something terrific take shape and grow where nothing existed before.

You are the critical factor

You are your own boss. What does it mean to be the boss? Does it mean that you get to order everyone around and give everyone else the tough jobs while you sit back and coach the team kids? It can if you want to do everything yourself. Because no one will be willing to work for you if you act like that. So, what does being the boss mean?

It means that you take all the risk, you work the hardest, you lead by example, you take the tough jobs, and you get all the phone calls that no one wants to take.

It also means that you set the standards, you chart the direction the gym will take, you set the gym up the way you want it organized, you work only with those you want to work with, and you get to see your dream take shape. You also reap any profits the gym might generate.

What kind of business should you start?

Before starting a business, one of the most important decisions to make is what type of business you want. For many beginning entrepreneurs, deciding what type of business to start is a difficult consideration. Because you are reading this book, you are obviously halfway toward making a decision. Since you are reading this book, you are either interested in starting a gymnastics school or desperate for something to read.

Saying you want to start a gymnastics school is very much like saying you want to buy a car. What kind of car do you want? Toyota? Ford? Cadillac? SUV? Or Tesla? The possibilities are amazing and totally different - in cars as well as gymnastics business types. In this decision process, first consider why do you want to open a gym? Next think about what your skills sets are that make you likely to do well at owning a club. What you would like to do? How good you are at managing people and money? Do you have the time and energy you have to devote to these important tasks?

Then consider the many decisions that will determine your school's approach? How large do you want your facility to be? Do you want a mobile program operated

from a van or a bus? Will you offer boys' and girls' instructional programs? Will you offer preschool programs? Competition programs? Junior Olympic, Xcel, or Elite program? Gymnastics for All performance groups? Adult programs? Recreational classes or Acro only? Birthday Parties, Open Gyms, or Parent's Night Out? Will you offer auxiliary programs like rock climbing, dance or karate? Cheerleading? Trampoline and tumbling? The list of possibilities grows larger each year with gym clubs adding programming like swimming, ice-skating and even educational preschools.

Deciding what you want, honestly assessing why you want to start a club, and what skills you possess and which ones you lack before you begin, and then working backward is the best way to plan your success. With your vision firmly in mind, use the process of "re-engineering" the concept to end at the beginning. If you want a closely held small gym business run by you and a few select associates, your plan will look very different than that of a large, complex multi-sport facility that is managed by you, but run by others.

Will your business succeed?

Once you have decided to start your own business, you need to define and sell your "product." What are you selling? To whom are you selling? Why are you selling this particular product or service? Is there a market? How much are you going to charge?

Nothing happens in business until something is sold. Selling is an essential part of a successful business, but many people shy away from sales because they do not want to feel they are manipulating the customer. Sales and manipulation are very different interactions. Manipulation is convincing a person to take your product or service regardless of their needs. This may cause a person to resent you and your company. Selling is the process of matching your product or service to the customer's needs. The first step is to determine whether or not the person wants or needs what you have to sell. There is a great deal of information on the sales process available at libraries and bookstores. Selling is an art form that requires practice, so do your homework.

Becoming a USA Gymnastics Member Club

Branding your new business one of the most important aspects of being successful and will be discussed at length in another chapter. As the National Governing Body (NGB) of the sport of gymnastics, USA Gymnastics is recognized and respected throughout the world. There is no easier or better way to brand your new gym than with USA Gymnastics. One of your first tasks as

an owner of a new gymnastics business is to become a member club by clicking [HERE](#) to sign up.

In addition to the credibility that becoming a USA Gymnastics Member Club brings to your gym club, being a member club will help as you begin and grow your business with a host of resources available to our Member Clubs and our [USA Gymnastics University](#).

In Depth

This handbook's purpose is to provide general information, not to give legal or specific business advice. No legal advice can be given because laws vary from state to state, laws are in a constant state of change due to legislation, and circumstances of particular matters that arise in gymnastics also vary widely and cannot be predicted in advance. For all of these reasons, every gymnastics club should retain local legal counsel to address all legal issues. Clubs should seek counsel regarding hiring and employment practices, and risk management policies and procedures, and should also contact their attorney immediately after any incident for guidance and direction.

Key Points

- Before starting any business, new owners should be clear in their own personal reasons for starting the business.
- The gym owner is the de facto leader, regardless of the organization. Even in a "turn-key" operation with directors and managers running the business, the gym owner is the ultimate authority with final responsibility.
- Gymnastics is a broad-based industry that encompasses many activities and services. Gym owners should avoid trying to do everything and risk not doing anything well. Razor sharp focus on priorities will help ensure a successful business.
- Perhaps the single most important decision a new gym owner can make is to become a Member Club of USA Gymnastics to take advantage of the many resources made available to USA Gymnastics Member Clubs.

CHAPTER TWO

SELECTING THE RIGHT LEGAL BUSINESS STRUCTURE



The Main Legal Business Structures

You probably already have a rough idea of the type of legal structure your business will take, whether you know it or not. That's because the ownership structure that's right for your business—a sole proprietorship, partnership, LLC, or corporation—depends on how many people will own the business and what type of services or products it will provide, things you've undoubtedly thought about quite a bit.

For instance, if you know that you will be the only owner, then a partnership is obviously not your thing. And if your business will engage in risky activities (for example, gymnastics!), you'll not only want to buy insurance, but also consider forming an entity that provides personal liability protection, which can shield your personal assets from business debts and claims. If you plan to raise capital by selling stock to the booster club or want to give your employees stock options, then you should form a corporation.

If you've considered these issues, then you'll be ahead of the game in choosing a legal structure that's right for your business. Still, you'll need to consider the benefits and drawbacks of each type of business structure before you make your final decision.

In all states, the basic types of business structures are:

- Sole proprietorships,
- Partnerships (general and limited),
- Limited liability companies (LLCs), and
- Corporations.

To help you pick the best structure for your business, this chapter explains the basic attributes of each type. And it will also help you answer the most common question new entrepreneurs ask about choosing a business form: Should I choose a business structure that offers protection from personal liability—a corporation or an LLC? Here's a hint as to what the best advice will be: If you focus energy and money into getting your business off the ground as a sole proprietorship or a partnership, you can always incorporate or form an LLC later.

Sole Proprietorship

Technically, a sole proprietorship is simply a business that is owned by one person and that hasn't filed papers

to become a corporation or an LLC. Sole proprietorships are easy to set up and to maintain.

If you plan to start a sole proprietorship and expect that your spouse may occasionally help out with business tasks, you should be aware that the IRS typically allows a spouse to pitch in without pay without risking being classified as an owner or as an employee of the other spouse's business. This situation is sometimes erroneously called a "husband-wife sole proprietorship."

From a legal standpoint, someone who does work for a business must be one of three things: a co-owner, an employee, or an independent contractor. But when that someone is your spouse, this rule is softened somewhat. Your spouse can volunteer—that is, work without pay—for your sole proprietorship without being classified as an employee, freeing the business from paying payroll tax.

That saves you money—and, if you have no other employees, also allows you to avoid the time-consuming record keeping involved in being an employer. Similarly, a spouse who is not classified as a partner or an independent contractor won't have to pay self-employment taxes, and your business won't have to file a partnership tax return.

Under marital property laws that vary from state to state, if a business is started or significantly changed when a couple is married, both spouses may have an ownership interest in the business regardless of whose name is on the ownership document. You may want to check with a lawyer who is experienced in handling marital property issues to see how your business could be affected in the event of a divorce in your particular state.

Finally, if you and your spouse both want to be active partners in a co-owned business—each with an official say in management—you should create a partnership or an LLC or corporation, even though this will mean filing somewhat more complicated tax returns and other business paperwork. If your spouse tries to squeak by as a volunteer in a so-called husband-wife sole proprietorship when you're really working together as a partnership, you run the risk of being audited and having the IRS declare you're a partnership—and sock your spouse with back self-employment taxes.

Setting up a sole proprietorship is incredibly easy. You generally don't have to file any special forms or pay any special fees to start working as a sole proprietor. You'll simply declare your business to be a sole proprietorship when completing the general registration requirements that apply to all new businesses, such as getting a business license from your county or city or a seller's permit from your state.

Pass-Through Taxation

A sole proprietorship is not legally separate from the person who owns it. This is one of the fundamental differences between a sole proprietorship and a corporation or LLC, and it has two major effects: one related to taxation and the other to personal liability.

At income tax time, a sole proprietor simply reports all business income or losses on his or her individual income tax return. The business itself is not taxed. The IRS calls this "pass-through" taxation, because business profits pass through the business to be taxed on the business owner's tax return. You report income from a business just like wages from a job, except that, along with Form 1040, you'll need to include Schedule C, on which you'll provide your business's profit and loss information.

One helpful aspect of this arrangement is that if your business loses money—and, of course, many start-ups, even those that eventually go on to do very well, do so in the first year or two—you can use the business losses to offset any taxable income you have earned from other sources.

Once your business is underway and turning a profit, you'll have to start paying taxes. Taxes can get fairly complicated and you may need some in-depth guidance. Talk to an accountant and/or your attorney for advice.

Another crucial thing to know about operating your business as a sole proprietor is that you, as the owner of the business, can be held personally liable for business-related obligations. This means that if your business doesn't pay a supplier, defaults on a debt, loses a lawsuit, or otherwise finds itself in financial hot water, you, personally, can be forced to pay up. This can be a sobering possibility, especially if you own a house, a car, or other property. Personal liability for business obligations stems from the fundamental legal attribute of being a sole proprietor: You and your business are legally one and the same.

While commercial insurance can protect a business and its owners from some types of liability (for instance, slip-and-fall lawsuits), insurance never covers business debts. The only way to limit your personal liability for business debts is to use a limited liability business structure such as an LLC or a corporation. More information about insurance is included in the risk management chapter.

Partnerships

A partnership is a business that has more than one owner and that has not filed papers with the state to become a corporation or an LLC. While businesses with two or more owners are partnerships by default, they still must satisfy various governmental requirements for starting a business.

Usually, when you hear the term "partnership," it means a general partnership. General partners are personally liable for all business debts, including court judgments.

In addition, each individual partner can be sued for the full amount of any business debt (though that partner can turn around and sue the other partners for their share of the debt). Another very important aspect of general partnerships is that any individual partner can bind the whole business to a contract or business deal—in other words, each partner has "agency authority" for the partnership. And remember, each of the partners is fully personally liable for a business deal gone sour, no matter which partner signed the contract. So choose your partners carefully.

There are also a couple of special kinds of partnerships, called limited partnerships and limited liability partnerships. They operate under very different rules and are relatively uncommon except for professionals such as lawyers and accountants.

Since a partnership is legally inseparable from its owners, just like a sole proprietorship, general partners are personally liable for business-related obligations. What's more, in a general partnership, the business actions of any one partner bind the other partners, who can be held personally liable for those actions. So if your business partner takes out an ill-advised high-interest loan on behalf of the partnership, makes a terrible business deal, or gets in some other business mischief without your knowledge, you could be held personally responsible for any debts that result.



For example, Tom Tumbler and Peggy Preschool are partners in a profitable gymnastics school. They've been in business for five years and have earned healthy profits, allowing them each to buy a house, new cars, and even a few luxuries. One day Tom, without telling Peggy, orders a brand new set of equipment he is sure will be a big boost for the girl's team program. But when the shipment arrives, so do the big bills. The result: the business runs up hefty debts. As a general partner, Peggy is personally liable for these debts even though she had nothing to do with the equipment purchase.

Before you get too worried about personal liability, keep in mind that many small businesses don't face much of a risk of racking up large debts. Insurance does not cover regular business debts, however. If you have significant personal assets like large bank accounts or real estate and plan to rack up some business debt, you may want to limit your personal liability with a different business structure, such as an LLC or a corporation.

By drafting a partnership agreement, you can structure your relationship with your partners pretty much however you want. You and your partners can establish the shares of profits (or losses) each partner will receive, what the responsibilities of each partner will be, what should happen to the partnership if a partner leaves, and how a number of other issues will be handled. It is not legally necessary for a partnership to have a written agreement; the simple act of two or more people doing business together creates a partnership. But only with a clear written agreement will all partners be sure of the important—and sometimes touchy—details of their business arrangement. In the absence of a partnership agreement, your state's version of the Uniform Partnership Act (UPA) or Revised Uniform Partnership Act (RUPA) kicks in as a standard, bottom-line guide to the rights and responsibilities of each partner. Most states have adopted the UPA or RUPA in some form. In California, for example, if you don't have a partnership agreement, then California's RUPA states that each partner has an equal share in the business's profits, losses, and management power. Similarly, unless you provide otherwise in a written agreement, a California partnership won't be able to add a new partner without the unanimous consent of all partners. (Cal. Corp. Code § 16401.) In short, it's important to understand that you can override many of the legal provisions contained in the UPA or RUPA if you and your partners have your own written agreement. Partnership agreements typically include at least the following information:

- Name of partnership and partnership business
- Date of partnership creation
- Purpose of partnership

- Contributions (cash, property, and work) of each partner to the partnership
- Each partner's share of profits and losses
- Provisions for taking profits out of the company (often called partners' draws)
- Each partner's management power and duties
- How the partnership will handle departure of a partner, including buy-out terms
- Provisions for adding or expelling a partner, and
- Dispute resolution procedures.

Some partnership agreements cover each topic with a sentence or two; others spend up to a few pages on each provision. You need an agreement that's appropriate for the size and formality of your business, but it's not a good idea to skimp on your partnership agreement.

A buy-sell agreement establishes rules for what will happen if an owner retires, becomes disabled, dies, gets divorced, or otherwise faces a situation that brings business ownership into question. Buy-sell provisions can exist in a separate document or may be included in partnership agreements or other organizational documents depending on the company structure: operating agreements for LLCs, or bylaws for corporations. Become familiar with the ownership issues that can arise when your business is owned by more than one person—and how best to head off problems with a solid agreement.

Limited Liability Company (LLCs)

One basic distinction that you'll probably hear mentioned lots of times is the difference between businesses that provide owners with "limited liability" and those that don't. Corporations and LLCs both provide owners with limited personal liability. Sole proprietorships and general partnerships do not.

Basically, limited liability means that the creditors of the business cannot normally go after the owners' personal assets to pay for business debts and claims arising from lawsuits. The decision to form a limited liability entity can dramatically affect how you run your business. On the other hand, while sole proprietorships and partnerships are somewhat simpler to run than corporations and LLCs, they may leave an owner personally vulnerable to business lawsuits and debts.

Like many business owners just starting out, you might find yourself in this common quandary: On one hand, having to cope with the risk of personal liability for business misfortunes scares you; on the other, you would rather not deal with the red tape of starting and operating a corporation. Fortunately for you and many

other entrepreneurs, you can avoid these problems by taking advantage of a form of business called the limited liability company, commonly known as an LLC. LLCs combine the pass-through taxation of a sole proprietorship or partnership (taxes on business income are paid on each owner's individual income tax returns) with the same protection against personal liability that corporations offer.

Generally speaking, owners of an LLC are not personally liable for the LLC's debts. This protects the owners from legal and financial liability in case their business fails, or loses a lawsuit, and can't pay its debts. In those situations, creditors can take all of the LLC's assets, but they generally can't get at the personal assets of the LLC's owners. Losing your business is no picnic, but it's a lot better to lose only what you put into the business than to say goodbye to everything you own.

Keep in mind that, like a general partner in a partnership, any member of a member-managed LLC can legally bind the entire LLC to a contract or business transaction. In other words, each member can act as an agent of the LLC. While LLC owners enjoy limited personal liability for many of their business debts, this protection is not absolute. There are several situations in which an LLC owner may become personally liable for business debts or claims. However, this drawback is not unique to LLCs—the limited liability protection given to LLC members are just as strong as that enjoyed by the corporate shareholders of small corporations. Here are the main situations where LLC owners can still be held personally liable for debts:

- **PERSONAL GUARANTEES.** If you give a personal guarantee on a loan to the LLC, then you are personally liable for repaying that loan. Since banks and other lenders often require personal guarantees, this is a good reason to be a conservative borrower. Of course, if no personal guarantee is made, then only the LLC—not the members—is liable for the debt.
- **TAXES.** The IRS or the state tax agency may go after the personal assets of LLC owners for overdue corporate federal and state tax debts, particularly overdue payroll taxes. This is most likely to happen to members of small LLCs who have an active hand in managing the business, rather than to passive members.
- **NEGLIGENT OR INTENTIONAL ACTS.** An LLC owner who intentionally or even carelessly hurts someone will usually face personal liability.
- **BREACH OF FIDUCIARY DUTY.** LLC owners have a legal duty to act in the best interest of their

company and its members. This legal obligation is known as a "fiduciary duty," or is sometimes simply called a "duty of care." An LLC owner who violates this duty can be held personally liable for any damages that result from the owner's actions (or inactions). Fortunately for LLC owners, they normally will not be held personally responsible for any honest mistakes or acts of poor judgment they commit in doing their jobs. Most often, breach of duty is found only for serious indiscretions such as fraud or other illegal behavior.

- **BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE LLC AND ITS OWNERS.** When owners fail to respect the separate legal existence of their LLC, but instead treat it as an extension of their personal affairs, a court may ignore the existence of the LLC and rule that the owners are personally liable for business debts and liabilities. Generally, this is more likely to occur in one-member LLCs; in reality, it only happens in extreme cases. You can easily avoid it by opening a separate LLC checking account, getting a federal employer identification number, keeping separate accounting books for your LLC, and funding your LLC adequately enough to be able to meet foreseeable expenses.

Like a sole proprietorship or a partnership, an LLC is not a separate tax entity from its owners; instead, it's what the IRS calls a "pass-through entity." This means the LLC itself does not pay any income taxes; instead, income passes through the business to each LLC owner, who pays taxes on the share of profit (or deducts the share of losses) on the owner's individual income tax return (for the feds, Form 1040 with Schedule E attached). But a multi-owned LLC, like a partnership, does have to file Form 1065—an "informational return"—to let the government know how much the business earned or lost that year. No tax is paid with this return.

LLCs give members the flexibility to choose to have the company taxed like a corporation rather than as a pass-through entity. In fact, partnerships now have this option as well. You may wonder why LLC owners would choose to be taxed as a corporation. After all, pass-through taxation is one of the most popular features of an LLC. The answer is that, because of the income-splitting strategy of corporations, LLC members can sometimes come out ahead by having their business taxed as a separate entity at corporate tax rates.

For example, if the owners of an LLC become successful enough to keep some profits in the business at the end of the year (or regularly need to

keep significant profits in the business for upcoming expenses), paying tax at corporate tax rates can save them money. That's because federal income tax rates for corporations start at a lower rate than the rates for individuals. For this reason, many LLCs start out being taxed as partnerships, and when they make enough profit to justify keeping some in the business (rather than paying them out as salaries and bonuses), they opt for corporate-style taxation.

Before you decide the LLC is the best thing since back handsprings, you should be aware that an LLC might not be as cheap to start as a partnership or sole proprietorship. To form an LLC, you must file Articles of Organization with your Secretary of State or other LLC filing office. A few states charge significant filing fees, plus annual dues (alternately called minimum taxes, annual fees, or renewal fees). These fees can push the costs of starting an LLC into the several-hundred-dollar range. Illinois, for instance, charges a \$500 filing fee, and California requires that you pay a minimum annual LLC tax of \$800 when you start your LLC—on top of its \$70 filing fee.

Many brand-new business owners aren't in a position to pay this kind of money right out of the starting gate, so they start out as partnerships until they bring in enough income to cover these costs. And if you're thinking of forming a corporation instead, keep in mind that most states charge at least as much in fees for corporations. This plus the added expenses of running a corporation (legal and accounting fees, for example) will almost always make a corporation more expensive to run than an LLC.

Corporations

For many, the term "corporation" conjures up the image of a massive industrial empire more akin to a nation-state than a small business. In fact, a corporation doesn't have to be huge, and most aren't. There are two major types of corporations – "S" and regular or "C" corporations. Stripped to its essentials, a corporation is simply a specific legal structure that imposes certain legal and tax rules on its owners (also called shareholders). A corporation can be as large as IBM or, in many cases, as small as one person. One fundamental legal characteristic of a corporation is that it's a separate legal entity from its owners. Another important corporate feature is that shareholders are normally protected from personal liability for business debts. Finally, the corporation itself—not just the shareholders—are subject to income tax.

Forming a corporation to shield yourself from personal

liability for business obligations provides good, but not complete, protection for your personal assets. Privately held corporations owned by a small group of people who are actively involved in running the business are much easier to manage than public corporations, whose shares are sold to the public at large. State and federal securities laws heavily regulate any corporation that sells its stock to the general public, while corporations that sell shares, without advertising, only to a select group of people who meet specific state requirements are often exempt from many of these laws. If you plan to sell shares of a corporation to the general public, you should consult a lawyer.

In addition to tax complexity, a major drawback to forming a corporation—either a C or an S type—is time and expense. To incorporate, you must file Articles of Incorporation with your Secretary of State or other corporate filing office, along with often-hefty filing fees and minimum annual taxes. And if you decide to sell shares of the corporation to the public—as opposed to keeping them in the hands of a relatively small number of owners—you'll have to comply with lots of complex federal and state securities laws. Finally, to protect your limited personal liability, you need to act like a corporation, which means adopting bylaws, issuing stock to shareholders, maintaining records of various meetings of directors and shareholders, and keeping records and transactions of the business separate from those of the owners.

The protection afforded by incorporating comes at a price. Figure in the likelihood that you'll have to hire lawyers, accountants, and other professionals to keep your corporation in compliance, and it's easy to see how expensive running a corporation can be.

If you decide to incorporate, you'll likely want to consult an accountant or small business lawyer who can fill you in on the fine print. The first thing you need to know is that you'll be treated differently for tax purposes depending on whether you operate as a regular corporation (also called a C corporation) or you elect S corporation status for tax purposes. An S corporation is the same as a C corporation in most respects, but when it comes to taxes, C and S corporations are very different animals. A regular, or C, corporation must pay taxes, while an S corporation is treated like a partnership for tax purposes and doesn't pay any income taxes itself. Like partnership profits, S corporation profits (and losses) pass through to the shareholders, who report them on their individual returns. (In this respect, S corporations are very similar to LLCs, which also offer limited liability along with partnership-style tax treatment.) These two types of

corporations are explained in more detail just below.

Like employee salaries, corporations can deduct many fringe benefits as business expenses. If a corporation pays for benefits such as health and disability insurance for its employees and owner/ employees, the cost can usually be deducted from the corporate income, reducing a possible tax bill.

As a general rule, owners of sole proprietorships, partnerships, and LLCs can deduct the cost of providing these benefits for employees, but not for themselves. The fact that fringe benefits for owners are deductible for corporations may make incorporating a wise choice. But it's less likely to be a winning strategy for a capital-poor start-up that can't afford to underwrite a benefits package.

This brings us to the problem of double taxation, routinely faced by larger corporations with shareholders who aren't active employees. Unlike salaries and bonuses, dividends paid to shareholders cannot be deducted as business expenses from corporate earnings. Since they're not deducted, any amounts paid as dividends are included in the total corporate profit and taxed. And when the shareholder receives the dividend, it is taxed at the shareholder's individual tax rate as part of personal income. Any money paid out as a dividend gets taxed twice: once at the corporate level, and once at the individual level.

You can avoid double taxation simply by not paying dividends. This is usually easy if all shareholders are employees, but probably more difficult if some shareholders are passive investors anxious for a reasonable return on their investments.

In Depth

After the decision is made to become a gym owner, selecting the proper legal structure is critical to help protect the gym owner's assets while supporting the goals and mission of the gym. The two most common structures are sole proprietorships or limited liability companies. A sole proprietorship gives a gym owner the most flexibility in making decisions, but exposes the owner to the most risk. Limited liability companies are usually effective in protecting a gym owner's personal assets, but require more administration and still involve some risks.

LLCs vs. Corporations

Before LLCs came along, the only way all owners of a business could get limited personal liability was to form a corporation. Many entrepreneurs didn't want the hassle and expense of incorporating, not to mention the headache of dealing with corporate taxation. One easier option was to form a special type of corporation known as an S corporation, which is like a normal corporation in most respects, except that business profits pass through to the owner, rather than being taxed to the corporation at corporate tax rates. In other words, S corporations offered the limited liability of a corporation with the pass-through taxation of a sole proprietorship or partnership. For a long time, this was an okay compromise for small-to-medium sized businesses, though they still had to deal with many of the corporate aspects that S corporations retained. Now, however, LLCs offer a better option. LLCs are similar to S corporations in that they combine limited personal liability with pass-through tax status. But a significant difference between these two types of businesses is that LLCs are not bound by the many regulations that govern S corporations.

Here's a quick rundown of the major areas of difference between S corporations and LLCs:

- **OWNERSHIP RESTRICTIONS.** An S corporation may not have more than 75 shareholders, all of whom must be U.S. citizens or residents. This means that some of the C corporation's main benefits—namely, the ability to set up stock option and bonus plans and to bring in public capital—are pretty much out of the question for S corporations. And even if an S corporation initially meets the U.S. citizen or resident requirement, its shareholders can't sell shares to another company (like a corporation or an LLC) or a foreign citizen, on pain of losing S corporation tax status. In an LLC, any type of person or entity can become a member—a U.S. citizen, a citizen of a foreign country, another LLC, a corporation, or a limited partnership.
- **ALLOCATION OF PROFITS AND LOSSES.** Shareholders of an S corporation must allocate profits according to the percentage of stock each owner has. For example, a 25% owner has to receive 25% of the profits (or losses), even if the other owners want a different division. Owners of an LLC, on the other hand, may distribute profits (and the tax burden that goes with them) however they see fit, without regard to each member's ownership share in the company. For instance, a member of an LLC who owns 25% of the business can receive 50% of the profits if the other members agree (subject to a few IRS rules).

- **CORPORATE MEETING AND RECORD-KEEPING RULES.** For S corporation shareholders to keep their limited liability protection, they have to follow the corporate rules: issuing stock, electing officers, holding regular board of directors' and shareholders' meetings, keeping corporate minutes of all meetings, and following the mandatory rules found in their state's corporation code. By contrast, LLC owners don't need to jump through most of these legal hoops—they just have to make sure their management team is in agreement on major decisions and go about their business.
- **TAX TREATMENT OF LOSSES.** S corporation shareholders are at a disadvantage if their company goes into substantial debt—for instance, if it borrows money to open the business or buy real estate. That's because an S corporation's business debt cannot be passed along to its shareholders unless they have personally cosigned and guaranteed the debt. LLC owners, on the other hand, normally can reap the tax benefits of any business debt, cosigned or not. This can translate into a nice tax break for owners of LLCs that carry debt.



truer if the business can't find or afford appropriate insurance.

If you decide that limiting your personal liability is worth the extra cost, you still need to decide whether to form a corporation or an LLC. With the LLC's arrival, many business owners who want limited liability protection realize that incorporation normally only makes sense if a business needs to take advantage of the corporate stock structure to attract key employees and investment capital. No question, corporations may have an easier time attracting capital investment by issuing stock privately or publicly. And some businesses may find it easier to attract and retain key employees by issuing employee stock options. But for businesses that never go public, choosing to operate as LLCs rather than corporations normally makes the most sense, if limited liability is the main concern. If the corporate stock structure isn't something you want or need for your business, the simplicity and flexibility of LLCs offer a clear advantage over corporations.

Choosing the Best Structure for Your Business

Although there are many differences among the various types of business organizations, most business owners choose an operating structure based on one legal issue: the personal liability of owners for business debts. While the issue of personal liability can have a huge impact on successful small businesses a few years down the road, business owners who are just starting out on a shoestring often care most about spending as little money as possible on the legal structure of their business. This is certainly an understandable approach: Far more new businesses die painful deaths because they don't control costs than because they lose costly lawsuits. In short, for many new small businesses, incorporating or organizing as an LLC is as unnecessary an expense as a swank downtown office or a gleaming chrome espresso machine in the lunchroom.

That said, owners of any business that will engage in a high-risk activity such as gymnastics, rack up large business debts, or have a significant number of investors should always insist on limited personal liability, either with an LLC or a corporation. This is even

Analyzing Your Risks

Starting a business is always risky. In the gymnastics businesses, however, the risks are particularly extreme. If you're planning to launch into this endeavor, there is little doubt that you'll need all the protection you can get, including limited personal liability as well as adequate insurance. Other businesses are not so obviously risk-loaded, but the gymnastics business carries multiple red flags for risk including caring for children, conducting activities that may result in injury, and possibly driving as part of the job, the use of heavy equipment, and using hazardous materials, such as cleaning solvents.

If you've identified one or more serious risks your business is likely to face, figure out whether business insurance might give you enough protection. Some risky activities are good candidates for insurance and don't necessarily warrant incorporating. But if insurance can't cover all of the risks involved in your business, it may be time to form an LLC or a corporation.

Keep in mind that insurance will never insulate you from regular business debts. If you foresee your business going into serious debt, an LLC or corporation may be the best business structure for you. Identify the number of owners of your business. Analyze your

business's risks and decide how much protection from personal liability you'll need.

Determine how you'd like the business to be taxed (as a pass-through entity or as a corporation). Decide if your business would benefit from the stock structure of a corporation (by being able to distribute stock options and sell stock).

If you will structure your business as a partnership, draft and sign a partnership agreement. If you will structure your business as an LLC or corporation, file articles with your state and draft bylaws (for corporations) or an operating agreement (for LLCs).

Government Requirements – Federal, State, and Local

You may feel ready to just open the doors and begin classes but there is a lot of truth in the axiom that no job is finished until the paperwork is done. Government regulations must be followed or your new business is at risk of not seeing a second season. There are a number of steps to take to meet government requirements:

Depending on the legal business structure, you may need to apply for a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) by filling out the required form.

If your business does not contain your name or match your LLC name, you will need to file for a Fictitious Business Name (FBN) and register as an assumed name Doing Business As (DBA). Depending on your location, this may be accomplished at the state level or with the county clerk where the business is located.

A business license and local tax registration is required in most cities. Contact your city clerk or city business office for the necessary forms. Depending on the location of your business, these same regulations may hold true at the county level.

Most states require seller's permits if the business includes general sales of retail products or services. This regulation allows the state to collect sales tax on tangible goods sold by the retailer. If you plan to operate a pro shop or sell items to the public, check with the state sales tax agency for information.

Make sure that you comply with local regulations pertaining to planning and zoning. You will likely be required to obtain a Use Permit for the operation of your business. Additional permits and licenses may be required, but almost every city will require a permit that will regulate hours of operation, parking,

traffic, environmental impacts, signs, lighting, etc. Certain uses will require conditional use permits and variances. Your building will likely require a Certificate of Occupancy. Again, check with your local planning department or zoning agency for details.

The message here is don't let yourself get caught up in an oversight or poor planning when it comes to your business structure of government regulations. Stepping through the bureaucracy is not fun, but is time well spent. You may wish to find an attorney and / or an accountant to help guide you through the process, but don't let the red tape keep you from at least looking into your dream.

Most cities and many counties require businesses to register with them and pay at least a minimum tax. And if you do business under a name different from your own, such as DBA Gymnastics, you usually must register that name—known as a fictitious business name—with your local municipality or county.

When filing for a business tax registration certificate with your city, you'll often be asked to declare what kind of business you're starting. Some cities require only that you check a "sole proprietorship" box on a form, while other cities have separate tax registration forms for sole proprietorships. Similarly, other forms you'll file, such as those to register a fictitious business name and to obtain a seller's permit, will also ask for this information.

Free and Low Cost Legal Resources

Before you call an attorney to handle a simple legal task, check out a few online and local options for low cost legal forms and services. Then, when you schedule an appointment with your attorney, you'll be better informed and possibly be able to save some expensive time, armed with the right questions you may not have considered otherwise.

Government sponsored and absolutely free to use, business.gov contains valuable information that will make managing your small business easier in a lot of ways. From statistical information to tax tips and a dedicated legal section, without a doubt, business.gov should be one of your first online stops.

Google docs at google.com make state specific legal forms available using easy to find and easy to use templates. If you're interested in drafting a binding promissory note (as well as other legal tasks), these forms will get you started. They're free too. You will probably have a few ancillary costs, like paying a notary

or making a legal filing, but you can get a leg up on the process with a few clicks.

Offering online and regional training and mentoring for small business, the dedicated and experienced brain trust at SCORE (Counselors to America's Small Business and formerly known as the "Service Core of Retired Executives") can help you overcome many of the hurdles you'll face in the early years of your small business, including legal challenges.

A number of Internet sites and software packages will help you with legal forms and legal direction for a nominal fee. NOLO, Intuit, and LegalZoom are just a few examples of sites eager to help you start your new business. From drafting your articles of incorporation to writing up a temporary power of attorney, these packages and services are offered at reasonable prices and usually include more background and handholding than some free sources.

Don't forget to check out local resources that can help you with legal issues. Depending on where you live, organizations that promote small businesses may include divisions with free legal counsel and services. Your local Chamber of Commerce, community college or university system may offer community outreach and low cost or even free legal classes and seminars. Before you invest in expensive legal services to help fulfill state or local requirements, check with the appropriate government offices.

Legal Structure Samples

- [Sample Buy-Sell Agreement](#)
- [Sample Partnership Agreement](#)

Key Points

- Selecting the correct business structure should not be taken lightly. The legal structure of any business is a critical decision that should be made after consideration of the benefits and risks of each structure as it relates to the business organization.
- Understanding the benefits and risks of each type of structure is crucial to making the decision that is best for the gym and the gym owner.
- Gym owners must be aware of local, county, state, and federal requirements before opening their business. Having the proper permits, certificates, etc. in place prior to opening the doors will avoid and prevent a lot of potential problems later.



USA GYMNASTICS UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

**CHECK OUT THE BUSINESS SECTION
OF THE USA GYMNASTICS LIBRARY FOR
VIDEOS AND ARTICLES**

CHAPTER THREE

BUSINESS PLANNING



A Business Plan is Essential

There are dozens of books and software packages that can teach you all about creating a business plan. In almost all cases these resources focus on the creation of a document called a “Business Plan” that you can present to a bank or other lending institution in order to obtain financing for your new business. In addition, the process of creating this “business plan” can help you attend to details that you might otherwise skim over or miss entirely.

It would certainly be helpful to consult one or more of these books or software programs (BPlan.com is a superb resource) and work your way through the steps they suggest whether you need to obtain financing or not. Additionally, the SBA website is an excellent resource for business planning.

Most importantly, whether you are seeking finance or not, you need to spend time planning for your business. While a formal “business plan” is one part of the process of planning for your business, there is much more to it than that.

Your plan for opening and operating a gymnastics business must include the development of a business owner’s skill set. It would be great if you were to get a degree in marketing, an MBA, a law degree, with accounting, bookkeeping, finance, and marketing thrown in for best results. If you were to set out to do all of this you would find yourself working about as hard as an elite gymnast and after 10-15 years or so you would be ready to have a go at opening a gym. You might even be successful.

But there are other approaches that might be a bit more practical. The fact that you are reading this publication is a great start. Those who have been there and who have lived to tell the tale offer the information and advice you find here. However, this book is but a first step.

The very first step, and one you should have taken long before you started reading this publication is to work in a gymnastics business. If you are working in a school or a community recreation center or a YMCA you should consider spending some time working for an organization that has to make a profit. The mindset and the culture is different than in a non-profit program.

Additionally, try your hand at many different positions within the gym. Teach and coach everything the gym offers and then step up and volunteer to organize and launch a new program. This will give you a good perspective as to what owning a gym is like.

If the gym in which you are working is not a particularly successful gym financially, then consider working for one that is. If you cannot work in a financially successful gym then at least visit one and take a very close look around.

How can you tell if a gym is successful financially? Look around. Is the gym clean? Is it air-conditioned? Is the landscaping nice? Are the mats torn? Is there someone on hand to answer the phone 12 hours a day? Does the staff wear uniforms? Is the gym busy all the time? Is the parking lot big and full of cars, and so on?

Make note of what works and what does not work. What does this gym do well that you can copy or adopt? What are the shortcomings, and how can you improve upon them? Are there opportunities that the gym is not taking advantage of? Start thinking like a gym owner.

After a while this way of thinking will become second nature. Once you feel a real desire to open a gymnastics business that is something special and that can offer a real benefit to the children and families in the community then you are probably ready to get serious about opening a gym of your own. You will be well into developing your plan for your gymnastics business.

As a business owner, you need a business plan because the process of planning and setting a direction increases your chances of success. Developing a business plan forces you to put your goals and ideas in writing. The process demonstrates your dedication to your business and clarifies your thoughts about what you wish to accomplish. When your plan is on paper, you have a guide to check on a regular basis to see if you and your business are on track. A business plan also gives potential investors and key employees an understanding of where the business is headed. When you approach a bank or other investment group for financing, you will definitely need a detailed business plan.

There are many excellent books and articles that describe the process of writing a business plan. Visit

any office supply or computer store to get an idea of the many software packages available that can help you construct your plan. A word of caution, however, regarding such “plan-in-a-can” programs: a well-written business plan must reflect your soul, your desire, and your determination to reach your vision - not some fill-in-the-blank template. After writing your business plan using a packaged program, re-read it and re-write it to reflect your vision for your business.

Outline of a Typical Business Plan

While there are a number of acceptable formats and styles of business plans; each plan contains certain information that is imperative to a successful proposal. The following is an outline for a typical business plan:

- Cover Sheet / Introduction
- Executive Summary
 - Business concept
 - Current status
 - Performance measures
 - Financial needs
- Vision
 - Vision/Mission/Values statement
 - Business milestones
- Market Analysis
 - Overall market synopsis
 - Market trends
 - Target market and customers
 - Customer characteristics
- Competitive Analysis
 - Industry overview
 - Industry trends
 - Competitive breakdown
 - Opportunities
 - Challenges and risks
- Strategy
 - Strategic plan
 - Strategic action plan
- Services/Product
 - Description of service/product
 - Comparative evaluation of service/product
 - Future services/products
- Marketing
 - Branding strategy
 - Marketing strategy
 - Advertising
 - Publicity
 - Promotions

- Operations
 - Staffing plan
 - Organizational structure
 - Facilities plan
 - Programming plan
 - Customer service plan
- Financials
 - Start-up cost estimate
 - Starting balance sheet
 - Profit / Loss forecast
 - Cash flow projection
 - Break even analysis
 - Balance sheet
 - Analysis

The Small Business Administration (SBA.gov) has many resources for anyone ready to explore starting a business, including the important task of writing a business plan. Putting a plan on paper forces you to think through important issues your business will face. The plan becomes a valuable tool as you set out to raise money or seek technical assistance, and it provides milestones to gauge your success. The SBA advises that a plan contain details about what the business will do, marketing, financing and management.

The plan should include an executive summary and supporting documents, such as tax returns, personal financial statements and resumes of the principals, copies of any proposed lease or purchase agreement for building space, copies of licenses and other legal documents; and if it's a franchise, a copy of the franchise agreement.

There are several SBA-related Web sites to help:

- SCORE, an SBA resource partner, has business-plan templates (www.score.org/template_gallery.html) that can help you navigate the process and samples of plans and financial statements created by its counselors. SCORE also has an online workshop (www.va-interactive.com/score) on writing a business plan.
- SBA offers many resources online about startup basics, including workshops (www.sba.gov/starting_business/startup/guide.html) and articles that can help you assess whether entrepreneurship is for you.

In Depth

Having a business plan is one of the most important parts of running a business, no matter what size or type of business. It is easy to start a new gym, but without careful planning it is like setting off to an unknown destination without a map. You might manage to make it to your destination eventually, but you could get really lost along the way.

As a small business owner, it is very tempting to neglect planning, especially if you consider yourself familiar with the industry. After all, planning can be a time-consuming process and for small business owner's time spent planning is likely to be time when they are not earning any money. But the benefits of good planning will far outweigh any temporary loss of earnings.

The great thing about a business plan is that it can provide a reference point for you to measure your progress. Just looking at a plan and seeing how far you have come is a great motivational tool. It can help you determine whether you have drifted too far away from your original vision and focus you to get back on track once again.

Writing a business plan will also help you to think more analytically than ever before about your industry and the role of your business within it. It will help you to see correlations between the different parts of your business (e.g. how increasing student/teacher ratios will affect your overall profit margin).

The value of a business plan simply cannot be overstated. Putting ideas and concepts down on paper is invaluable and the act of researching and compiling data about your competitors and the market will prove to be very useful in the years to come.

Vision, Mission, and Values for Your Business

An important step in the development of your business is to state your purpose or goal in writing, otherwise known as your Mission Statement. A Mission Statement reflects your reason for existing as well as your goal for your business. For example, USA Gymnastics' Mission Statement is as follows:

“The mission of USA Gymnastics is to encourage participation and to pursue excellence in all aspects of gymnastics.”

Although writing a mission statement might not seem very important at first, you will be surprised at how much it can help you along the way as you are making decisions about program, policies and marketing. A well thought-out mission statement can be your guiding light for years to come! It also tells potential investors and customers what you are all about in a simple, concise statement.

Writing your mission statement is an important step toward creating your business' niche. You might compete head-to-head with existing programs or create a new approach within the community. If you choose to compete head-to-head with existing gyms, seek a way to differentiate your business from established programs.

There are successful schools that approach gymnastics from very different viewpoints. The most critical issue at work here is that each school is a reflection of the desires, strengths, abilities, and personalities of its owners.

The following chapters of this booklet address issues any gymnastics school must face. Your answers to the questions posed should reflect not only what you think the community wants, but also your personal goals and aspirations.

You need to make an honest assessment of how hard you are willing to work, as well as your ability to manage people. Gather as much information as you can by talking to other gym school owners and by attending business seminars offered at USA Gymnastics National, Regional or State Congresses. You might also consider contacting a gym consultant to discuss various issues, or plan to attend a workshop or “boot camp” specifically designed for gym owners.

Facilities Planning

Once you have decided on the type of gymnastics business you would like to own, location is indeed the first of the three decisions that you must make when it comes to the actual physical reality of your gymnastics business. But the other two are just as important.

So important, in fact, that it is highly likely that the decisions you make about your facilities will have more to do with the ultimate success of your gym than any other decisions you will make. If you make the right decisions you will have a much better chance to do a great job for your students and make a decent living than if you do not.

The Three Decisions:

- Where should I locate the gym?
- How big should the gym be?
- How should I layout the gym?
- Where should I locate the gym?

Location, Location, Location. The decision to rent/ lease or buy/own your facility will be included in your business plan, but if you ever want to make any money you must locate where there are enough children to fill your gym and you must locate in a community where the families make enough money to pay for gymnastics. High population density and above average household income levels: these are the keys. There are some exceptions.

It should be obvious that if you live in a tiny town in rural Minnesota and you want to open a gymnastics business in your tiny town, you will have a tiny business because there are not many children around. This does not mean that you cannot make a go of it in Tiny Town, but it does mean that the other two factors, size and layout, become even more important to you as you strive to keep your costs low while you try to maximize your income.

There are Tiny Town gyms all over America where the owners open a gym in their town because they want to live and work in small town USA. They also want the benefits and joys of gymnastics to be available to the children in small town USA and they want to be able to pursue their love of gymnastics. These owners are opening a gym in order to buy a certain lifestyle that is not so much centered on money as it is on staying close to home. Even so, the gym must still make a profit in order to keep the doors open.

It should also be obvious that if you choose to open a gym in the inner city core of large-city, urban America you will have a very small business because many of the families who live in inner-city America typically cannot afford to pay for their children to take gymnastics in a for-profit gymnastics school. This is not to say that these children do not deserve a gymnastics education, and does it imply that the parents of these children do not want their kids to have every opportunity. It is simply recognition of economic reality and it points to the need to have not-for-profit recreation centers, church and civic organizations, YMCA's and other entities shoulder much of the work here. However, there are gyms that do make a go of it in these environments and some

of these gyms have been in business for years. Like their counterparts in small town rural America these gym owners do not operate their gyms so much for the financial rewards as they do for the kid and community rewards.

For most prospective gym owners the choice of location will fall somewhere in between these extremes. We have already looked at extremes at the upper and lower end of population density and income levels, now let's take a look at the high end of both.



From an income generating perspective there can be no better location for a gymnastics business than in the growing, affluent, high population areas spreading outward from our major cities. The endless suburbs are what we are talking about and many gym businesses are thriving in such an environment. Within this suburban environment several specific factors come into play that should impact your decision on where to locate.

1. Convenience is the ultimate determination of where most of your prospective customers will send their children for their gymnastics lessons so make sure your gym is convenient. The biggest convenience factor is a short drive. Try to locate in the center of the suburban area so there is housing all around you. It is often cheaper to locate on the edge of town but if you make this choice you make your gym convenient for a much smaller percentage of the families in the area.
2. To the extent that you can, locate in an area that is already supporting other businesses and facilities that cater to children and their families. If there are already thriving music studios, tutoring academies, outdoor sports facilities, day care centers, elementary schools try to locate in this area. Such a terrific location provides the convenience of "one-stop-shopping" for your families, great exposure as families pour into this area and find your gym, and the peace of mind that comes from locating your new gym in an area that has proven it can support similar businesses.
3. There is one caution, however. Be very careful if you contemplate locating your new gym close to an existing gymnastics school. Unless you are absolutely positive that you can do a much better job, a job so good that you will pry families away from the existing gym, or you are certain that your

brand of gymnastics is so different than theirs that you are offering your products to different client bases, then think many times before you pit yourself against an established gym. At the very least you are splitting your potential customer base by sharing the pool of potential students with another gymnastics operation. At the worst you commit financial suicide by going up against a large established gym that can fight back by adding space, programs, equipment, and staff that you will be hard pressed to match as a start up business. Large and successful gyms are large and successful for a reason. Think hard before you locate within 5-10 miles of a thriving gymnastics school.

4. Even if you cannot locate in an area full of child-centered businesses and programs you can look to locate in an area that draws plenty of families for other reasons. Grocery stores, home improvement centers, and drug stores generate loads of traffic and are good ways to help your potential families find you.
5. Be very careful if you look to locate in a warehouse complex. There are two major drawbacks to this type of space. First, you will have little exposure within the broader community, which means that you will have to advertise more. Second, to the extent that your children and families have to compete with large trucks for space within the parking area you will create a huge turn off for many customers. Plenty of successful gyms have located in these types of complexes but times and expectations change, and you should be careful.
6. Finally, be aware of natural and man-made barriers that make any location less convenient. If you have choices within a good area pay attention to the factors that can make your otherwise terrific location tough for your customers. Barriers such as rivers, freeways, and mountains often have few ways to get across and these choke points may cause your potential customers to have to drive a long way to get to you. Of critical importance is traffic and parking. No one wants to sit in massive traffic jams in order to get their kids to gymnastics, or get to the gym only to find all available parking spaces filled. Most gyms are too big and the parking lots too small.

How big should the gym be?

Most gyms are actually too large while most parking areas are too small. A newer trend in the gymnastics industry is for the creation of large multi-activity venues

under the gymnastics umbrella. These centers often offer youth sports, dance, martial arts, aquatics, and many other activities alongside gymnastics.

According to the results of the 2006 USA Gymnastics Member Club survey, the average gym in the United States is over 15,000 sq/ft. Almost two-thirds of the 335+ gyms that responded to the Member Club survey conducted in the summer of 2012 reported that enrollment, gross income, and net profits are all up as compared to one year ago. The average gym enrollment in the USA stands at around 640 children. There is no way to put this delicately. In the vast majority of cases an enrollment of 500 students cannot support a gym that is 15,000 sq./ft., or larger, in size. The owners of these types of gyms are, on average, not making much of a profit based on their investment of time, effort, and money.

So, how big should your new gym be? Since everyone's situation is somewhat different it is difficult to provide specific answers. But if the national averages are used as a starting point some general standards can be presented.

The first standard has to be the recognition of the fact that 500 students can easily be accommodated in a gym that is 10,000 sq./ft. in size or smaller. This is true even when the gym offers a competitive team program. In fact, a very general rule-of-thumb can provide a quick approximation of how much space is actually needed. As a starting point consider 10 sq/ft for each student a good estimation.

Thus, a gym with an enrollment of 250 students should be able to operate effectively and efficiently in a gym of 2,500 sq./ft. Five hundred students: 5,000 sq./ft. One thousand students: 10,000 sq./ft. and so on.

It may seem difficult if not impossible to operate a gym, let alone a competitive team, in such a modest gym. Doing so is neither easy nor convenient, which probably explains why so few even make the attempt. But those who have an interest in both doing a fine job with their students and making a good living for themselves would not operate in any other way.

Another way to think about the relationship between the size of the gym and the size of the enrollment is to consider the implications of a very simple number. That number is "gross income per square foot".

In order to determine that number divide the total revenue earned each year through the normal operations of the gym by the total square feet of the facility. If the gym takes in \$500,000 and the gym

operates in a 15,000 sq./ft. facility, the equation looks like this: $\$500,000 / 15,000 = \33.33 .

According to the National Member Club Survey gym owners who reported annual income per square foot of \$40.00 or less made less than \$50,000 a year through the operation of their gymnastics business. Those that reported income levels at \$25.00 per square foot or less earned less than \$25,000 a year.

It was only when income levels reached \$50.00 or more per square foot that compensation levels for gym owners climbed above \$75,000 a year. How many of the nation's gym owners achieved this level of income? Only about 25%.

In the vast majority of cases the gyms in the survey operated in facilities that were too large for the number of students enrolled. Overhead and operating costs including rent, utilities, maintenance, insurance, equipment, and so on can be overwhelming. This is particularly true in the summer when children typically head outdoors leaving the gym to struggle with low enrollment for three months of the year. So, how big should the gym be?

It should be big enough to provide an outstanding learning environment for the students while still allowing the gym owner to realistically achieve income levels at \$50.00 per square foot or more. What does this mean?

If we assume an average enrollment of 500 students with 50% of those students enrolled in preschool classes, 40% in recreation classes, and 10% in competitive team programs then the gym should probably plan to offer the following equipment and space:

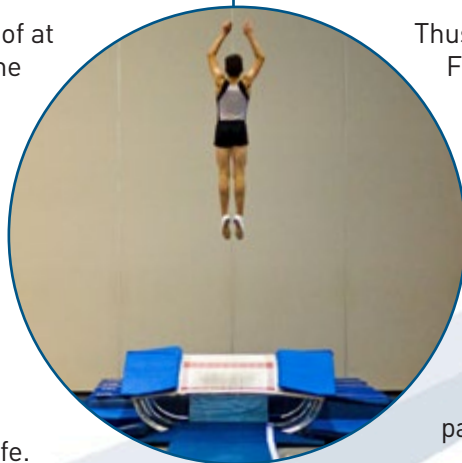
1. Administrative and support facilities totaling no more than 20% of the total square footage. This space includes restrooms, waiting area; office and counter space, storage, and a waiting sibling play area. A staff lounge area is a nice luxury but it is a luxury. Many successful gym owners do not consider the waiting sibling play area a luxury. (1,750')
2. Floor space is the single most important area in the gym. A competition floor measures 42' X 42'. This is the absolute minimum that should be provided for floor. A competition cheer floor measures 42' X 54' (USASF) and providing a floor this size allows for the addition of cheerleading training which is a very good idea and it also adds additional floor space that can always be put to good use. If the additional cheer floor space is thought of as a side-panel then

extending that side-panel into a 54'-60' spring-strip makes a lot of sense. This extension instantly adds an additional tumbling station in your gym and it allows the gymnasts to perform full-out floor routines while still permitting other gymnasts to tumble. This spring-strip can also empty into a pit. (2,500')

3. According to the assumptions made above approximately half of a successful gym's enrollment can and should come from preschool students. Therefore, you simply must dedicate space to the preschool program. If you decide to organize your preschool classes to make use of creative circuits that are set up each week in the gym (a very good idea) then a successful gym will make use of at least two such circuits each class whenever one, two, or three classes are running. It takes 1,200 sq/ft to organize two terrific circuits. It can take as much as 1,600 sq/ft to organize three circuits. If your preschool students do their music and theme inspired warm-ups on the spring floor then perhaps they can make use of the side-panel added for cheerleading. If not, then the gym owner must dedicate space to provide a warm-up area for the preschool students. (1,200')
4. A simple vaulting station requires 100' X 8' at a bare minimum if you are ever going to train optional level gymnasts. If optional level gymnasts are not an issue, then less can work just fine. Depending on the gym layout, the vaulters can also run across the spring floor making use of the spring strip if that has been extended to 60'. (800')
5. The bar area should provide at least three training stations. A typical set-up would include two sets of uneven bars and a single bar. Use space savers to make the foot print of the bars as small as possible. Try to set them up in a single line to save on matting and floor space. A tight set-up used for recreation students and compulsory level gymnasts can fit in an area 12' X 44'. Optional level competitors will require additional space. Additional single bars or a star-bar is a smart addition for the recreation students. (525')
6. The balance beam area should provide at least four beams. Additional beams cut down on lines and waiting time. A mixture of low, medium, and high beams is ideal. Dismount areas at the end of the beams is not necessary for all the beams. In fact, unless you are training optional level athletes it might not be necessary at all. Plan of 6' between each beam and be sure to provide padded, unobstructed space at the end of the beams in the event of a fall. (600')

7. Trampolines are an absolute must for a successful gym school. The children love trampolines. Gymnastics is a very difficult sport and trampolines provide an easy and fun event each week on which every child can experience some success. Trampolines will keep your students coming back. Some guidelines: (320')

- a. Do not make use of round back-yard trampolines. You must differentiate your professional gymnastics program from these non-professional pieces of junk.
- b. Seriously consider making use of at least two trampolines so that the kids get twice as many turns. Three would be better.
- c. You need not offer competition grade trampolines. Plenty of companies offer trampolines with beds that are 6' X 12'. Tumbling tramps (TumblTrak) are an excellent alternative if there is no trampoline.
- d. Make the trampolines super safe. Put them in the ground, surround them with baseball netting, or construct decking around them so the children cannot fall off. Above all, trampolines require constant supervision.



since the gym can put a group on vault, bars, beam, and floor. Actually, there is additional room available on trampoline and a second group could make use of the floor, but for this example only four groups will be considered at a time. Four groups with 8 students in a group mean that 32 girls can take class at the same time. Depending on class length at least three class times can be offered each night Mon-Thursday with additional classes offered on Saturday morning. This means that 480 girls a week can take class using this type of organization.

Thus far nothing has been scheduled for Friday night, Saturday afternoon, or at any time on Sunday. These times have traditionally been used for competition team training. These athletes pay much less per hour than the recreational children do and one of the trade-offs for those lower tuition rates is training slotted for non-prime time hours in the gym. This "free" time can also be used quite effectively for birthday parties.

It is true that most gyms cannot count on full classes all the time. But it is also true that half the gyms across the country put seven children in preschool classes and nine in school-age classes. Do the math and discover how many additional students can be added making this one simple adjustment to your gym organization. There is also additional free space in the gym at the beginning and end of the evening during which additional classes can be offered for cheerleaders, for trampoline and tumbling, boy's classes, and so on.

Thus far, the administrative areas, floor space, preschool areas, and equipment area come to about 8,000 square feet. If you were to add nothing extra, a well-organized gym could easily provide lessons and team training to 500-1,000 students in this space.

If you are skeptical that 1,000 children can train in a gym that is 8,000 square feet, then consider this. This layout provides space for three groups of preschool students to take class at the same time. If we assume three classes with six students in class at a time then 18 children can take class at a time. Four 45 minute classes can be conducted in a three hour block of time so seventy-two children can take class each evening from 4:30-7:30. If preschool classes are offered every evening as well as on Saturday morning then 360 preschool students can take class on Monday through Thursday evenings plus Saturday morning. Add another 140 students taking preschool classes during the day and this gym would easily have room for 500 preschool students.

The single biggest obstacle to operating your gym in this way could come from a lack of parking places. If three groups of preschool students and four groups of school age children are taking class at the same time, then 50 parking places will be required if every parent parks and enters the gym. If some of these classes begin and end at the same time then many additional spaces will be required for the overlap. Add in staff parking and a thriving gym will require close to 100 parking places. Also ensure that adequate "drop-off" space is allowed. Children being dropped off for classes should have safe and well-lit access to the gym. The total number of parking spaces required may be dictated by your local planning department regulations.

This gym can also offer four classes at a time for girls

Should the gym owner want to add in-ground pits, boy's equipment, or other items an additional 2,000 square

feet should provide the space necessary and would bring the total square footage to 10,000 square feet.

The only reason to make the jump from an 8,000-10,000 sq/ft gym to one that is 15,000 square feet is to provide separate training space that would allow two groups to train at the same time on vault, bars, beam, and floor. This might also be the case if a competitive boy's team had to operate at the same time as a gym full of girl's teams and classes.

How should I layout the gym?

Many gym owners coached competitive gymnastics teams prior to opening their own gyms. Many others were competitive gymnasts themselves or had children in competition prior to opening their gyms. In most cases these gym owners organized their gyms around the competitive team. This might be a problem.

While coaching or offering a competitive team might be the driving force behind opening a gym in the first place, please consider that offering a quality competitive program is very difficult if the gym is not making enough money to hire and retain terrific coaches, provide new equipment when the old wears out, or when the electricity is shut off. The primary revenue producing programs are preschool and recreation classes. It is impossible to do any job at all when the gym goes out of business. Be smart and plan your profit-making gym space first.

One of my early mentors told me, "Customers will not come to your gym because the bathrooms are clean and well stocked, but they will stop coming if they are not." Words of wisdom that hold true after forty years.

Equipment Planning

Another crucial decision about starting your gymnastics business is the selection of apparatus and equipment. Obviously you will need appropriate equipment for your planned programs and you will need adequate equipment to conduct your operations according to the business plan.

Apparatus and equipment can be purchased or leased, and can be new or used. The United States Gymnastics Suppliers Association (USGSA) is a supporting partner of USA Gymnastics and is an excellent source for the

needs of a new gym owner. All equipment should be maintained and inspected according to manufacturers guidelines and used as designed. Many gyms have multiple sets of certain apparatus, depending on the program. Make sure to allow for proper landing areas and traffic patterns when placing the equipment.

Sufficient mats are mandatory for any gymnastics program, and I have never heard a gym owner say that they have too many mats. Following manufacturer's guidelines, make sure all mats are properly used, properly maintained, cleaned, and disinfected on a regular basis, and replaced when necessary. Dirty, chalk-covered, worn out mats with ripped and torn covers are far too common in many gyms, and indicate a culture that the gym owner may not want to project. Mats must be able to function as impact attenuating surfaces or as rebound devices. If they no longer serve their function, they should be replaced.

Regular inspections, maintenance and repairs are imperative to the risk management program and help protect you from some liability claims should an issue arise over the condition of the apparatus. You should keep a written record of these equipment checks. If equipment becomes worn or begins to show signs of failure (such as cracks or splits, metal fatigue, smooth spots, etc.), the equipment should be repaired or replaced. When mats begin to lump, sag, or show their age, get rid of them. Do not resell, donate or give away anything that you are not willing to have in your gym. Unsafe equipment should be destroyed not given to someone else to cope with.

Every piece of equipment has an estimated life expectancy. Plan a replacement program and track the condition of everything in your gym – whether it is the balance beams, uneven bars, or the carpet or computers and printers you use. Make sure your equipment is working properly and efficiently. Capital replacement costs should be included in your financial planning.

Business Planning Samples

- [Business Plan Outline](#)
- [Action Planning Worksheet](#)

Key Points

- A written, detailed business plan is one of the most important tools for a new gym owner. A business plan can guide the organization in acquisition of funding, in effective operations, in proper staffing, and in programming.
- A business plan helps identify the vision, mission, and values for your business as well as the measurable results that will define success for the gym.
- A typical business plan includes detailed information on location of the facilities, design, and type and layout of the equipment.
- Making use of the many available resources such as the Small Business Administration will make the process of creating a business plan easier for a new business owner.



USA Gymnastics University BUSINESS COURSES

- U100: Fundamentals of Gymnastics Instruction**
 - U101: Safety & Risk Management**
 - U301: Stewards of Children**
 - U310: Regional Congress**
 - U410: National Congress**
 - B101: Business Foundations 1**
 - B201: Business Foundations 2**
- B202: Creating an Outstanding Customer Care Culture**
 - B301: Business Foundations 3**
 - B302: Business Foundations 4**
 - B401: Business Foundations 5**
 - B402: Business Foundations 6**
 - B410: USA Gymnastics Business Forum**
 - B411: Jeff Metzger's Club Owners Boot Camp**
 - B412: 3rd Level: Business Brain Trust Conference**

CHAPTER FOUR

FINANCIAL PLANNING



You sacrifice, work hard, and make all the right decisions, but your gym club's success ultimately depends on how much money you have to back up your venture. You must have enough capital to stay afloat until your business is generating more income than it is paying out. You will need funding to get started; money to furnish the facility, purchase equipment, hire and train staff, advertise, get utilities in place as well as buy insurance.

These early expenses are called "startup costs." You estimate these costs by calculating the amount needed to operate your business during the startup phase and adding this amount to your living expenses for the same period (a sample worksheet for computing your startup costs is included in the Appendix).

For a more extensive worksheet, consult the Starting and Operating a Business series available at bookstores and from your local Small Business Administration (SBA) Business Information Center. Call (800) 697-4636 to find out more about the resources available through the SBA (look for the SBA's "Resource Directory for Small Business Management.")

One of the primary reasons small businesses fail is due to insufficient start up capital. Don't become a statistic. Do the work and understand just how much money you are going to need in reserve to help get your club off the ground and to sustain it during its growth to becoming a profitable, self-sustaining business.

Start Up Financing

Do you need to borrow money to get started? If so, from whom will you borrow the money? Small businesses are often financed through owner savings; loans from family, friends, and commercial lenders; bonds; stocks; ownership stakes; and other arrangements. What are the terms? Can you meet those terms? What happens if you can't? While many people borrow start-up capital from family members or friends; think twice before entering into such a relationship. If you do accept a loan from a friend or family member, be sure to discuss the terms of the loan just as if you were borrowing from a bank and document your agreement in writing.

If you plan to go to a bank or the SBA for a loan, you should prepare a report that includes the following information:

- Owner's resume
- Project description
- Projected (pro forma) financial statements
- Personal financial statement

Many of these items will already be included in your business plan.

One of the most important considerations when determining whether to start your own business is the fact that you could fail. Below are some of the typical causes of business failure:

- **Inadequate capital.** If you can't pay your bills, you will have to close the doors. Especially in the startup phase, make arrangements for backup capital from banks, investors, family or friends.
- **Product or service not needed.** In marketing, the perception of need is much more important than the need itself. This is especially true when selling a service. A service business succeeds because the owner has convinced the customer base that he or she is providing a valuable service.
- **Under-pricing.** A common practice that draws customers during the startup phase is underpricing the competition. When offering low introductory prices, the discounts must be budgeted as normal business operating costs. For example, a 10% discount on \$5,000 should be budgeted as a \$500 cost.
- **Excessive overhead.** In a service business, the largest expense usually is staff. When deciding whether to add overhead, ask yourself these three questions:
 - Will this expense add to sales?
 - Is this expense absolutely necessary to maintain long-term quality and service?
 - Do I take a substantially greater risk by adding this overhead than I do by going without it awhile longer?
- **Insufficient time commitment from owner.** Many owners convince themselves that a manager can run their business with part-time oversight by the owner. Until the business is up and running, the owner should be around full time to monitor, train and develop systems to track the operations of the business.

- **Bad luck and/or timing.** Circumstances can create company-killing situations. There is always the possibility of a downturn in economic conditions or an “act of God” such as a flood or earthquake. Prepare yourself as best as possible for emergency situations. There is a type of insurance called “business interruption insurance.” Talk to your broker to see if this type of policy is right for you.
- **Poor understanding of business.** If you lack expertise in any of the following areas, you will soon get an education or go out of business:
 - How to collect money
 - How to close sales
 - Purchasing
 - Negotiating
 - Government regulations
 - Taxes
 - Hiring and firing
 - Motivating employees
 - Securing financing
- **Problem location.** The location of your business could be great but overburden you with too high a rent, or have a low rent but be situated too far from your customer base. The area’s customer demographics can change, leaving you with a less desirable location.
- **Poor accounting controls.** The sales journal and cash receipts must be reconciled on a daily basis. Without controls, you could lose track of customers and not receive payment, or even double bill a customer. By monitoring your payables, you can prevent double paying a bill or not paying a lost bill. You also need to protect tax withholdings so that the money is there when it comes time to pay the IRS. Invest in a good business accounting software program that matches your ability to understand the basics of accounting. Then hire someone to help set you up, if needed, and use the software diligently.

In the following chapters, we will address many of these issues that often keep new business owners from succeeding. If you decide to pursue this venture, be sure to buckle up, hang on, and enjoy the ride.

In calculating start up costs, we can revisit our analogy with automobiles. General costs for a car varies depending on what kind of car you want - Ford, Porsche, Toyota, Chevy, or Ferrari? The same is true for gymnastics training facilities. Start up costs can range from tens of thousands to millions of dollars. A lot depends on the size of the gym, geographic location,

amenities included, and type of facility. Maintenance fees and insurance are usually directly related to those same factors. There is also liability insurance based on the number of students. After you’ve written your business plan, if you’re seeking funding from a bank or other lender, a well-crafted loan proposal is your next step.

A loan proposal must answer:

- Who are you?
- How much money do you need?
- How are you going to repay the loan?
- What happens if you can’t repay it?

The SBA advises that a loan proposal contain:

- **A summary.** This should be clear, concise, accurate and inviting. Summarize how the loan will be used and repaid.
- **Top management profiles.** You will need resumes, a summary of experience, and the qualifications and credentials for owners and key members of management.
- **Business description.** Include a brief overview of the history and a summary of current activities. Demonstrate that you understand your field. It is also helpful to include letters from suppliers, customers and other business references.
- **Projections.** Include projected income and cash-flow statements for two to three years. Your assumptions should be clearly stated and realistic.
- **Financial statements.** Include business and personal financial statements. Make sure you understand the “story” that your financial statements tell.

In Depth

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), seven out of ten new employer establishments survive at least two years and 51 percent survive at least five years. Those businesses that don’t succeed, typically fail due to insufficient capital. Sound financial planning is ensuring enough funds to operate for five years. Avoid the common mistakes of starting your business for the wrong reasons, poor planning, poor location, poor management, poor marketing, and you won’t end up poor.

- **Purpose of the loan.** Present a detailed statement of how you will use the loan proceeds. Include proceeds of the loan in your cash-flow projections (and the interest in the projected income statement).
- **Amount.** When determining the amount, ask, “How much money do I need, and how much will they lend?” and not, “Will they lend it?”
- **Repayment plans.** In the first package, you will propose the terms you want, but ultimately this will be a point that will be negotiated with the bank.

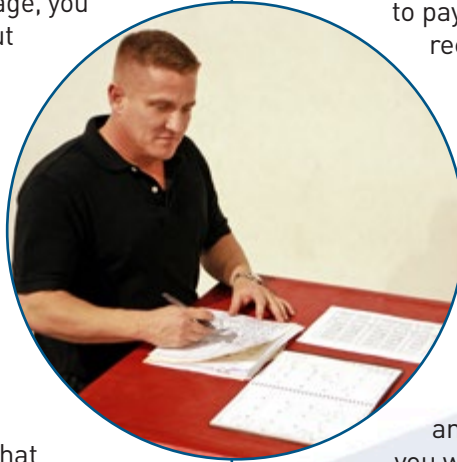
Small Business Administration Programs

Here are some of the loan programs offered by the SBA. For a complete list and details on how to apply, click [HERE](#).

- **7(a) Loans.** The primary SBA loan program helps small businesses that might not be eligible for loans through normal lending channels. Money can be used for a variety of business purposes. The loans are made through commercial lenders and partially backed by an SBA guaranty.
- **CDC 504 Loans.** Made through a certified development company, a 504 loan provides long-term, fixed-rate financing for real estate, machinery or equipment. Typically, the loan involves a private-sector lender with a senior lien, a certified development company and at least 10 percent equity from the borrower.
- **Microloans.** Provide short-term loans of up to \$35,000 for working capital or purchases, but can't be used for real estate. The loan is through a nonprofit community based lender. The typical microloan size is about \$13,700.
- **International Trade Loans.** An applicant must establish that the loan will significantly expand or develop an export market and that it is adversely affected by import competition. Proceeds can be used to upgrade equipment or facilities to be used in the United States to improve competitive position.

Establishing Fees for Your Programs

As to cost per lesson, this fee varies on length of lesson, length of session, class level, market, and program. Class fees can range anywhere from free (subsidized non-profit programs) to hundreds of dollars per hour (private lessons).



A positive situation with gymnastics businesses is the fact that almost all gym owners collect fees for services (classes) before those services are provided. This can work to a gym owner's advantage in that there is no guesswork on how many classes need to be conducted, how many staff to schedule, etc. This also creates a cash flow situation that demands constant attention so that there is enough money left over each month to pay expenses. Even though income is received up front, the gym still has the liability of performing services. The disadvantage comes if the owner ever decides to close the doors and needs to refund any fees collected.

Performing a fee survey of other gyms in the area to see what they are charging is a great place to start, but that will only give you an idea of the current market. The more investigation, research, and market analysis you do, the more information you will have to help you make important decisions. Understanding what your competitors charge gives you a standard to work from, but should not be the primary basis of your assessment of what to charge. After all, you cannot rely on the idea that your competitors are particularly good business people!

Going back to your business plan, calculating how much money you will need to charge in order to conduct business, you will find a minimum amount you will need to recover expenses. Your business plan will have identified your fixed costs (rent/mortgage, lease payments, utilities, payroll, taxes, insurance, and operating expenses) that will remain constant. You will need to decide how much money you need to make (or want to make), while considering what the market will tolerate. From there you can set your fees accordingly based on that amount. Pricing is an art and a science.

Another decision you will need to make is the student: teacher ratio you will use for each level of class. Remember that there are fixed costs associated with your business and it will cost you the same amount to run a class with two students as it will to run a class with ten students. Maintaining full classes is a great way to improve your bottom line.

There is a lot of debate over cost recovery rates and how often and how much and how often to raise fees. This is a business philosophy question that has proponents on every side – charge premium rates and work the top percentage based on high quality, or go for the low

fee model and work for high enrollment based on price, or take the value-added route and sell your service based on comparison to your competitors, and everything in between. Which model you choose will depend on your personal philosophy as well as the kind of space under which you are operating your gym. A word of warning: Some people think that offering the lowest price in town will attract more customers. Be cautious in doing this. “low price leader” pricing strategies seldom work well in service-oriented businesses.

Finally, there is typically a tremendous seasonal variance in revenues. Summer is often the “slow season” for gymnastics. Most gyms host clinics and camps to compensate for the lower summer class enrollments. Be prepared to continually monitor your cash flow, it will vary from month to month, but expenses will not necessarily vary in the same manner. Additionally, be aware that there will be some months where large bills arrive (i.e. taxes,

insurance premiums, inventory for your pro shop etc.) and you need to be aware of when those expenses are due in order to make sure you have sufficient funds to cover costs.

Financial Planning Samples

- [Break Even Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [Cash Flow Projection Worksheet](#)
- [Equipment and Apparatus Inventory Depreciation Schedule](#)
- [Equipment and Apparatus Inventory Replacement Schedule](#)
- [Profit-Loss Forecast Worksheet](#)
- [New Program Budget Worksheet](#)
- [Various IRS Tax Forms](#)

Key Points

- Start up funding can come from many sources including personal savings, family and friends, crowdsourcing, business loans, or stocks. Understand that there are benefits and risks associated with each funding source.
- Operating funds are realized through the sales of services and merchandise. Establishing appropriate fees for classes is a crucial decision that should be based on comprehensive market analysis and budget planning.
- Take advantage of available resources to assist your financial decisions. The Small Business Administration has numerous programs to help new gym owners.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES



Having rules, policies, and procedures in place may make the difference between smooth transitions and troubled times. Organizations find that a policies and procedures manual is a useful training tool for new employees and a reference tool for efficiently running their business.

Any employer that decides to implement personnel policies and procedures and/or prepare and distribute an employee handbook for dealing with human resources must first evaluate its own culture and its desire to communicate to employees in a more formal and structured manner. If an employer decides to issue an employee handbook or policy manual, the following information provides an overview of some of the issues an employer must address when preparing a handbook or policy manual. All policies should be tailored to reflect the employer's own business and unique needs, while taking into account the Federal, State and Local laws.

Aside from the Employee Rules and Polices Manual, an Operations Manual should be created to address the routine day-to-day operating of the gym and dealing with customers. Well thought out policies and procedures can head off potential trouble during the course of regular business. Not to mention that a well-systemized business will be more effective, efficient, and profitable.

Please note: The materials contained herein are not intended to constitute or provide legal advice. Employers drafting or revising an employee handbook or employment policy manual should have that handbook or manual first reviewed by legal counsel before implementing and distributing to employees.

Let's take a look at what a policies and procedures manual should include, how your agency can prepare one and how to avoid common mistakes.

- **Policy:** A policy is a statement of operating intent that explains a particular action or function and why it is necessary. Written in terms that allow for some flexibility in interpretation. (i.e. "We offer a money back guarantee if not completely satisfied.") Policies help dictate employees' general behavior and are intended to serve as guidelines for implementing plans and solving frequently occurring problems. Policies will not be effective if your employees

do not understand your organization's overall objectives and goals.

- **Procedure:** A procedure is a prescribed method for implementing a policy. Procedures are the established protocol for the implementation of a policy. It is usually an extensively detailed statement and specifically limits or directs the actions of those involved. (i.e. "To process a customer refund request: Fill out the top section of the blue form titled..."). Some procedures may be guidelines that direct a course of action, especially if there are a variety of methods available to meet the policy (i.e. "A child may make up a class in class of similar type so long as there is space or the child may make up a class by receiving a pass to open gym.").

How to Get Started

Create a master file for all documents you'll need in preparing your manual. Start a three-ring binder or use computer folders to maintain and manage all pertinent documents. A three-ring binder may be the best format for maintaining employee guidebooks. Revisions and additions can be made without reprinting the entire document, and many people still feel more comfortable with a "hard copy" to reference. Hard copy handbooks are also easier to distribute to the staff. That said, more and more young people are comfortable with electronic copies of documents and there is a cost saving in not having to print copies of the handbook.

Each page in the manual should be dated to reflect its timeliness. There are a variety of policies and procedures, which reflect the business policies, practices, and operations of a particular employer. Divide the manual into sections for each major area. Collect existing policies and procedures related to each section. Manuals or documents that indicate or describe the organization's policies on various issues will be helpful. For sections where your gym has not adopted written policies and procedures, insert blank sheets of paper. Use them to draft outlines of what you think your organization's policies and procedures should be for these areas. To ensure consistency, objectivity and uniformity in the interpretation and application of such policies and procedures, and to give employees the opportunity to understand the rules and regulations which govern their working environment, employers may want to consider including

in a handbook some of the following sections and/or policies and procedures:

Introduction

In this section the employer should welcome employees to the company. The history of the organization and the values / vision / mission statement should be included at the beginning of the policy manual.

Employment Issues

There are many personnel (human resources) issues that arise in the operation of any business. More detailed information is included in the Human Resources Chapter, but employers may want to consider writing guidelines and rules relating to any of the following:

- Equal Employment Opportunity Statement
- Recruitment and hiring procedures (including rejection of applicants policy)
- Employment status and probation policy
- Employment of relatives
- Employee medical information
- Immigration law compliance
- Conflict of interest issues
- Outside employment
- Uniform or dress code policy
- Gifts and gratuities
- Non-compete and non-disclosure statement
- Discipline policy
- Access to personnel files
- Drug, alcohol and tobacco policy
- Vacation, holiday, and leave policies
- Benefits policy
- Use of gym property
- Technology and social media policy
- Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP)
- Personnel (personal status changes) data changes
- Anti-violence and harassment policy
- Introductory / probationary / training period
- Work schedules and timekeeping requirements
- Rest and/or meal periods
- Employee and management responsibilities

A handbook or policy manual should always be reviewed to make sure that the written language actually means what it says and does not say or imply something about the employment relationship that the company does not intend. Every word of an employee handbook should be read carefully to see if it could be interpreted to mean something different than what the company intended it to mean. Any promises or guarantees in a handbook or policy manual should be eliminated unless the employer is prepared to be

bound by its implied promises and guarantees. Avoid the use of “will,” “shall” or “must” when discussing employer’s obligations toward employees. These words tend to connote a contractual guarantee. Eliminate any promises or representation made of “job security” or promotional opportunities. The employer may have a legal obligation to fulfill these perceived promises if found in the handbook. Finally, it is not necessary to have a written policy for all of these points. What is important is that you purposefully decide that you do not want a written policy, not that you simply forgot to consider that point.

Operational Issues

There are also many issues that arise in the day-to-day running of any business. Employers may also want to consider writing guidelines and rules relating to any of the following:

- Safety and Safe Work Practices
- Business (finance and accounting) expenses and purchasing
- Equipment use / inspections / maintenance
- Use of phone and mail systems
- Emergency action plans
- Program information
- Use of company equipment and vehicles
- Facility operations
 - Open and closing procedures
 - Utilities shut-off locations
- Customer service
 - Registrations
 - Refunds
 - Transfers
 - Orientations
 - Forms, etc.
 - FAQ’s

Add other sections that your organization considers vital to its success. It is important to review annually your employee policies and procedures handbook and operations manual to see whether any revisions are required. Although the cost of regularly updating the handbook is a consideration, the ramifications of not doing so could be much more substantial. Failing to maintain your handbook increases the likelihood of legal action by a disgruntled employee or customer. It is also important in light of the ever-changing Federal and State laws.

After deciding to write or update your policies and procedures manual, put it on the agenda for the next staff meeting or meeting of the board of directors. This is so management can prioritize the project and allocate resources to complete this critical project correctly.

Manual Dos and Don'ts

Developing an effective manual will take time, and you may be hesitant to start. Keep in mind the benefit of producing your own manual—and learn from other people's mistakes. Here are some dos and don'ts to help you avoid common mistakes that can lower employee moral, waste staff time, drain income, and risk costly lawsuits and legal actions.

DON'T just write down policies as you think you need them. Some agencies don't see the need—or don't want to take the time—to decide on their policies and procedures comprehensively in advance and put them in writing. Instead, they wait until a problem has arisen and its handling has been botched. Learning the hard way is not recommended, especially when you consider that every organization has sets of issues that can lead to big problems.

DO write the policies and procedures manual early in your organization's life. Review it periodically for needed changes or improvements. Accounting and computer policies and procedures, in particular, require more frequent updating as you change accounting software programs, outsource operations or return them in-house and adapt to technological advances. Manuals updated to reflect these types of changes are more useful for employees.

DON'T copy another agency's manual. Copying someone else's manual is common. Although it may be quicker and cheaper in the short run, it could cost more in the long run. And you may implement policies and procedures you do not understand or that do not apply to your organization. It is acceptable to use another operation's policies as a template but take the time to create your own set of rules, policies, and procedures.

DON'T write your manual as though you distrust your employees or customers. Writing your manual as though you are expecting trouble and don't trust or respect your customers and employees is bound to create resentment and resistance. Employees will perceive the manual as something negative that is being imposed on them. Customers will soon recognize restrictive policies and archaic procedures and take their business elsewhere.

DO ensure your manual conveys to customers and employees that you are committed to providing a quality business environment. This means a manual that enables every employee to reach his or her highest

possible level of professional fulfillment. In return, you hope that your employees will expend maximum effort toward performing their jobs and achieving your organization's goals.

DON'T discount the value of documented policies and procedures. Many organizations take the initial step of writing down their policies and procedures, and then fail to take final steps that give them the protection they need. They neglect to have employees "sign off" on the policies, and they fail to document problems when employees violate the policies or fail to perform their jobs' essential functions.



DO thoroughly document employees' performance problems and policy violations in writing. If employees violate your policies or fail to perform jobs adequately, you will ultimately be forced to take corrective action. You may have to discharge employees, after which they'll immediately seek unemployment compensation.

Fortunately, you may not be liable for the claim if you can show the discharge was for a valid, business-related cause.

Documentation can help protect your rights and control possible litigation costs.

A Good Start

Once you have a rough draft of your organization's rules, policies and procedures, you may want to present it for review with your senior management staff or Board of Directors for input and begin customizing it to fit your special goals and needs. Following that stage, you should present the manual to your attorney for evaluation. In any case, your policies and procedures manual will likely undergo many revisions – it should be considered a "working document" that may never be a final edition. When distributing handbooks (whether new or revised) to employees, it is highly recommended that the employer include a separate acknowledgement form to be signed by the employee and returned for retention in the employee's personnel file.

The form should acknowledge receipt of the handbook, indicating that the employee has read and become familiar with the provisions contained in the handbook, was provided an opportunity to ask for clarification, and acknowledge the employment relationship. A form, which contains this above information and is signed by the employee, will provide the employer with a better defense against breach of contract and employment claims.

Employers may want to add a statement to the employee acknowledgement / signature form or in the introduction section recommending that employees consult their supervisor or manager if they do not understand any statements or policies or procedures in the handbook.

Continue to update and improve them, and your organization will benefit from policies and procedures that work, ensuring that your business is getting better all the time.

Unwritten Rules

It is imperative that every business has and maintains a good employee manual and guidebook. Every staff member should receive a copy of the organization's policies and procedures immediately upon employment. However, no guidebook can include every situation a business will encounter in its operations. Likewise, no manual can cover every behavior expected of an employee. There are always "unspoken rules" in every organization. Most of these unspoken rules are what make up the culture of the business.

For example: if a door is closed, you don't just walk in -- you knock first. Or if someone is on the phone, you lower your voice so as not to disturb a business transaction. Simple things that many people would consider common sense would not necessarily be included in an employee manual. While a few organizations have written policies and procedures addressing body odor or excessive use of perfume, these things are often left as unspoken rules.

Many gym owners/directors/supervisors are reluctant to deal with "violations" of unspoken rules because it is often embarrassing or uncomfortable. An employee may get defensive or angry, or actually deny the behavior. Fortunately, this is an opportunity to develop the positive culture in your gym.

Hopefully you have a generic policy on professional behavior in your employee manual that you can refer to as you coach your staff member into the practices you want followed. During new staff orientation is a good time to proactively discuss unspoken rules. When "abuses" occur, you can remind your employee of that discussion. Point out the issue (opening closed doors, loud talking, etc.) and make it a mentoring moment. Say things like, "I wanted to make you aware of one of the unwritten rules of the business world in order to help you succeed in the future."

Violations of clearly defined policies and procedures often result in some level of disciplinary action. Guiding employees on the unwritten rules of the gym is probably the only place you, as the owner/director/supervisor, can give a mixed message on employee improvement. Unwritten rules violations allow you to say things like, "You probably didn't even know that the use of excessive perfume is not acceptable here and we need to have you tone down your use," or "You may not even realize that your perfume is a little overwhelming and our unwritten rule is to keep the use of perfumes to a minimum."

Use the opportunity to point out other unwritten rules that you may have in mind at the moment but avoid piling on or lecturing. Don't overwhelm an employee with a long list or they'll feel like they've been scolded. Pick your moments and over a period of time almost all of the inappropriate behavior should disappear. Use a kind and caring approach, rather than a judgmental tone and employees will respond to your coaching. Do your part by giving a guiding hand on some of the social and corporate graces. If every newcomer had someone who took them under their wing in a caring way, retention of young coaches/instructors wouldn't be such a big issue.

Documentation

Gymnastics professionals have an obligation to produce and maintain accurate, complete, and permanent records of a variety of aspects of the business. The kind and extent of documentation may vary according to the circumstances, the nature of the record, or whether an

In Depth

A business plan is the road map for your new gym, but rules, policies, and procedures are the actual route taken for successful operations. Changes in legislation and industry standards of practice make policies and procedures more important than ever. Policies provide a direct connection between your vision and the day-to-day operations, while written procedures identify clear and easily understood actions to eliminate misunderstandings. Good policies and procedures allow employees to understand their roles and responsibilities within predefined limits and allow managers to control events and prevent the organization from making costly mistakes.

individual procedure or a policy is to be documented. The purposes of such documentation are:

- To supply records that can help avoid misunderstanding and unnecessary litigation;
- To aid the gymnastics professional by providing a reference that can assist in the continued development of knowledge;
- To aid in providing information helpful to future planning;
- To add to the profession's body of knowledge;
- To aid the owner, coaches, parents, and society as a whole in the appreciation and use of information by increasing understanding of the unique characteristics of gymnastics.

You may have heard the axiom, "If you didn't write it down, it didn't happen!" This is the position of many lawyers and judges. Good documentation is vital for doing business in the regulated world. Good documentation is vital for due diligence and litigation situations, and it is vital for the success of your business and services. While the regulations tell you what you must do and best practices tell you what you should do, they don't tell you how. Based on industry best practices, refine your existing system, create a new one, or prepare to transition from an informal to a legitimate document retention system.

The following is a brief description of some items to include in your documentation system:

- **Business Records:** Income and expense statements, receipts, tax records, etc.
- **Hiring and Employment information:** Employment applications, acknowledgement forms, W4 forms or W9 forms as well as proof of eligibility for employment in the U.S., USA Gymnastics membership numbers, background check completions, professional development completed, emergency contact information, reference records, staff meeting minutes, training schedules, performance evaluations, disciplinary actions, etc.
- **Student information:** Registration records, medical history, indemnifications, hold harmless agreements, waivers, medical treatment permission, attendance sheets, lesson plans, progress reports, skill sheets, etc.
- **Operational information:** Policies, procedures, equipment manufacturer's spec sheets, inspection logs, maintenance records, incident reports, customer service policies, class schedules, employee standards, etc.

- **Correspondence:** Copies of all e-mail, letters, phone logs, newsletters, fliers, staff meeting minutes, parent meetings, letters, etc.

If any of the documentation is produced or received in "hard-copy," the original can be scanned and saved as a digital copy, but check with your attorney for the legality of any document being used for legal purpose. Good computing practices recommend scanning important documents and saving duplicate back-up copies off-site on a portable hard drive.

Updating Documentation

Many types of documentation should be produced and regularly updated. Documentation such as business practices, policies and procedures should be modified as needed. The gymnastics professional should strive to provide staff and customers the most recent information available. This requires continuous attention to changes and current trends, reviewing pertinent documents and making changes as necessary.

Evaluate the documentation you prepare for effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. Update as appropriate and be sure to provide access (keeping in mind some documents must remain confidential in order to ensure privacy rights) to the newest revisions.

Following any incident report, conduct a thorough investigation (with appropriate interviews) and create a photographic record if necessary. Date the reports and any subsequent revision, keeping all copies produced. In addition to the operating system date stamp on computer files, it is a good idea to develop a consistent file naming system that includes the date in the file name (e.g. 2012-06-17 aspire for better documentation). Using the same file name with a date will help create a "paper trail."

Preservation and Retention of Documentation

Certain documentation must be saved for certain periods of time, (i.e. tax records saved according to state and federal regulations, student records saved as dictated by state statutes, etc.). Consult a knowledgeable attorney and your insurance broker for advice on a records retention schedule for important legal documents. Some documents can be destroyed as desired, while others should be retained for a very long time.

There is no one-size-fits-all answer because the law varies from state to state regarding how long a person has to sue for personal injury. Typically the time limit

to sue for a person, who sustains an injury as a child, does not start to run until after the child turns 18. The number of years after the individual turns 18 varies from state to state; the range is roughly 2-4 years. And there are other complications, unfortunately. Some states do not start that 2-4 year clock running until after the plaintiff connects his current condition with a prior injury (sometimes called the “discovery rule”). In the same vein, some child abuse victims claim they suffer from “repressed memory” – i.e., they claim that their minds repressed the memory of the abuse due to the trauma of being molested by a trusted teacher, family member or minister. Some victims have argued, with success, that the statute of limitations does not begin to run until they have recovered the memory of the abuse. When you put all of these factors together, a person physically injured at age 10 might be able to bring suit 10 years later or more. A person molested at age 10 might have even longer to sue. At the same time, however, most people sue within 2-3 years after a physical injury.

Given that gym clubs deal with children, it makes sense to retain key records such as waivers and releases and medical authorization forms for 2-4 years after the gymnast reaches his or her 18th birthday at a minimum. The clubs should consult counsel in their

home state to determine how long after the 18th birthday to retain documents in light of the complicating factors in physical injury and molestation cases discussed above. The clubs should also get advice from local counsel about whether they may archive their documents as computer files (which are also separately backed up at a secure, off-site location or on a cloud-based server) rather than retain original hard copies, which can save space.

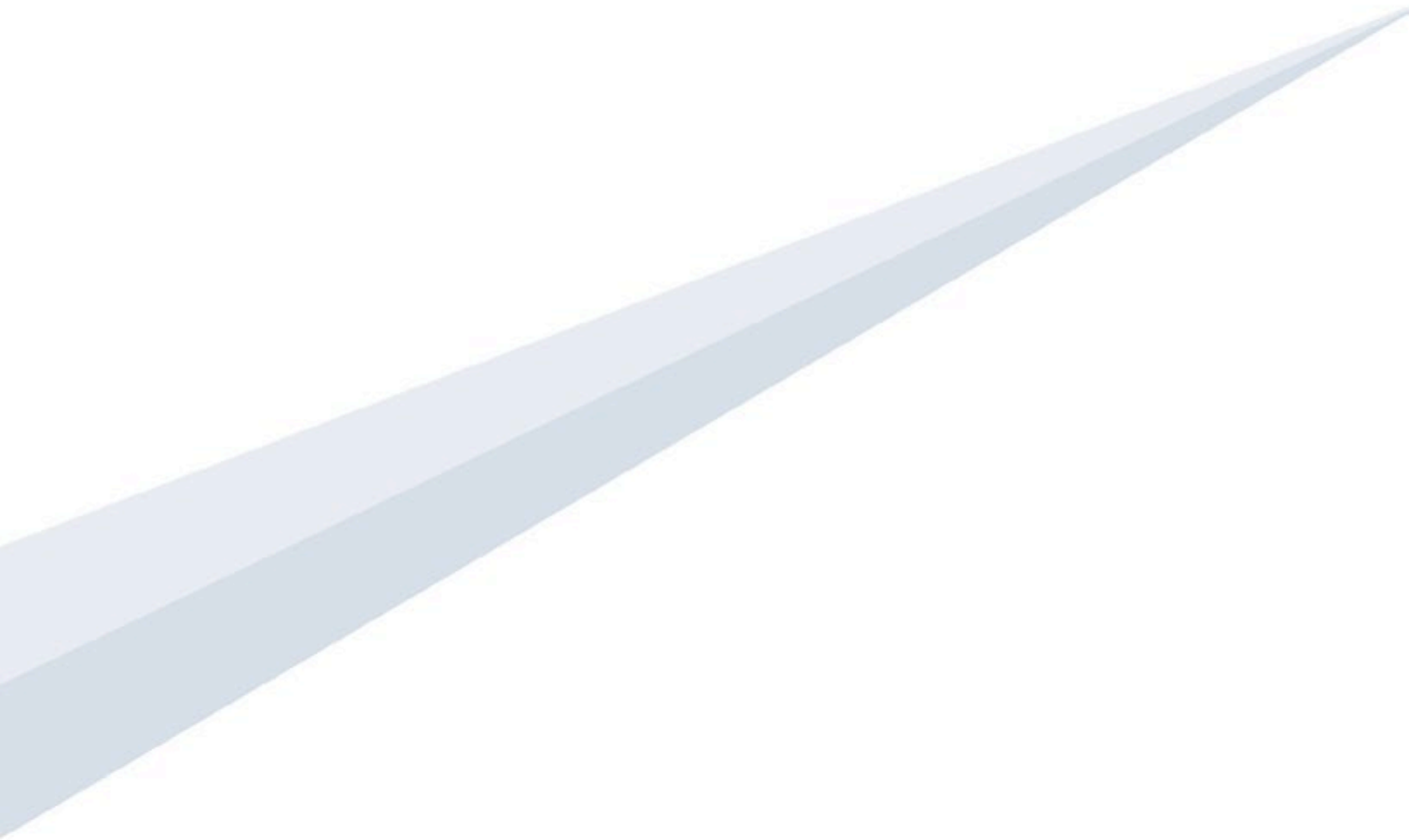
To emphasize one additional point, a club should never discard an insurance policy. Most liability coverage is offered on an “occurrence” basis; so if a claim arises based upon an injury that occurred 5 years ago, the policy in place 5 years ago (not the current policy) is likely to be the one that would apply. And if the policy cannot be located and there is a dispute about whether coverage exists, courts may require the club to prove that it had coverage.

Policies and Procedures Samples

- Sample Policies and Procedures are included with the Operations or Human Resources Chapters

Key Points

- Policies are broad-based statements based on the philosophy and vision of an organization, while procedures are specific action-oriented guidelines designed to support a policy.
- Having a policies and procedures manual can take many forms and formats, but developing a document of rules, guidelines, actions, and methods is critical for every business.
- An employment policies and procedures manual should address how all employees, regardless of job description or title, are expected to conduct themselves. Employee policies and procedures are typically developed and distributed to all employees to use as a guide, referring to it often to find information on the company, as well as guidelines on vacation, sick time, benefits, and compensation. Proper employment policies can help a gym owner comply with OSHA and FMLA regulations.
- An operational policies and procedures manual establishes standards of operation for financial practices, facility and equipment operations, and general activities in the gym.
- No manual can cover every concept and situation that a gym owner will be presented with. Every business has an intrinsic culture that is the heart of the organization, and culture deeply influences employee behavior where no written rules exist.
- An important aspect for all policies and procedures is having, maintaining (reviewing and updating), and retaining all documentation. Ensure that all documents have origination or revision dates, and preserve business documents for as long as possible.





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CHAPTER SIX

HUMAN RESOURCES



The heart of any great organization is the people in that organization. Everything begins with the staff. Your employees are your greatest resource. After an extensive hiring process, there is a reason that Disney spends five complete days training their employees before allowing them to meet the public. The staff that the client sees and deals with on a regular basis is the most important reflection of your business. Disney recognizes that the maintenance worker that walks around the park sweeping and picking up litter is the most visible front line employee and the one that needs to know everything about dealing with customers, and trains them accordingly.

Hiring the proper and correct staff is critical to a successful gymnastics organization. Staff should be a reflection of what you want your organization to look like. Your employees need to have similar goals and objectives to you. Surrounding yourself with people who share your vision will create a productive and vital organization. It requires patience and discipline, but sometimes the wisest hiring decision is the decision NOT to hire. Hiring the wrong person is always trouble. Hiring the right person saves everyone a lot of time and effort in the long run.

Your staff will have a number of responsibilities and in return will enjoy numerous benefits. You must expect them to act in a professional manner. Hold them accountable for their actions and behavior and in return you must treat them as a professional. You must also remember that they represent your organization and they will be asked to respond appropriately to many different situations. Hiring the right person is probably the most important decision a gym owner can make.

Employment Interviews

When is the last time you thought about the questions you ask employee candidates in an interview? Or changed those questions to stay current or reflect the changing attitudes and needs of the job seekers in today's market? Are you asking questions that comply with the law? Here are some recommended do's and don'ts for interview questions.

It is pretty typical to start the interview by asking "Tell me about yourself." With a question this vague, you're opening yourself up to some potentially uncomfortable answers. And really, this question only serves to make

job prospects squirm. Yes, you might hear something of value, but more often than not, you're going to get a rundown of a resume you can read yourself, or a blank stare and uncomfortable pause before a candidate blurts out, "Where should I start?" Why not just get to the point? Ask. Think about what you want candidates to tell you about themselves. Their volunteering habits? "You mention your affiliation with Habitat for Humanity. Can you tell me more about that experience?" "Can you describe the moment or point in time when you knew you wanted to become a gymnastics instructor?"

Have you ever asked a candidate "Tell me about your biggest strength/weakness?" This question begs for fabrication. Often, candidates — and people in general — answer questions about themselves as they'd like to see themselves — not as they are (even if they don't realize they're doing it). Sally may say "I have superior attention to detail," but her real strength may be more specifically attention to detail in certain areas — or she may not even be aware of her flair for public engagement. Alternately, asking for a candidate's biggest strength will likely result in an answer that's twisted to make it appear as a strength, which doesn't necessarily help you. Does "I'm a perfectionist" or "I'm sometimes too ambitious for my own good" ring a bell? Ask for a candidate's strength/weakness, but also ask, "Can you give me an example of a situation in which you've displayed this strength/weakness? Biggest strength: How did it help you in this situation? / Biggest weakness: What did you learn from this?"

When you ask a candidate to describe a situation in which they overcome a challenge or saw a project to its conclusion you get the internal eye roll from prospective employees. Again, it's vague. You ask candidates to be specific in the achievements they describe on their resume, so why don't you be more specific as well? What piqued your interest from the accomplishments listed on the candidate's resume? Try rephrasing this question with "What are you most proud of from the X program, and why?" You could follow up with a question like, "What would you do differently next time to make the class more successful?" or "How did this success spark ideas for your next program?" This frames the question in a more positive light, and enables the candidate to talk in-depth about a project or accomplishment he or she is proud of and passionate about.

Candidates barely know what they're doing for tonight's dinner these days, let alone five years. Many people move jobs often, and by pigeonholing them with the question, "Where do you see yourself in five years?" and you could be missing out on a question that will really reveal their aspirations in the near-term future, which may be more valuable. Get a feel for where candidates' head is now, while still learning more about what they hope to achieve. "What is the first thing you want to accomplish with this position?" Or "What most excites you about this potential job role? How do you see this being different than your previous experience?"

Think about the question "Why should we hire you?" The tables have turned, Millennial (aka Gen Y) candidates in particular want different things from a job than in the past: flexibility, quality of life, and more. Yes, candidates must "sell" themselves and their qualifications for a position to you, but how can you sell yourself to them as well? Despite a tight job market, it's not fair to assume candidates will take the first job that is offered to them. Rise above your competition and offer them something different. This is an excellent opportunity to tell candidates about you, or reiterate your company's strengths (even though they've likely already researched your company), while giving the candidate a chance to talk about what's most important to him or her. "We believe our flexible scheduling options, 401(k) matching, and casual dress code are a few things that set our company apart. What made you most interested in working for our company?" or "What is your ideal company environment?"

In order to achieve their goals of getting certain information out of employee candidates, recruiters and hiring managers need to be careful in the way they phrase certain interview questions; otherwise, they could face potential legal ramifications. Gym owners and hiring managers should already know that any question that asks a candidate to reveal information about his or her national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest record, military discharges, or personal information is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But while avoiding these subjects sounds easy enough, it's not always glaringly obvious what questions might be construed as inappropriate – even when they seem harmless on the surface. Below is a guideline to avoiding 10 potentially dangerous questions – while still getting the information you're looking for.



1. **ASK:** Are you legally authorized to work in the United States? **Not:** Are you a U.S. citizen? or Where were your parents born? Questions about national origin or ancestry are prohibited as they have no relevance to the job at hand or work status. The exception to this rule, of course, is if the position specifically requires one to be a U.S. citizen (and it should state so in the job posting).
2. **ASK:** What is your current address and phone number? or Do you have any alternative locations where you can be reached? **Not:** How long have you lived here? Like the question above, this one alludes to a candidate's citizenship. Stay away.
3. **ASK:** Are you able to perform the specific duties of this position? **Not:** Do you have any disabilities? or Have you had any recent or past illnesses and operations? You may want to know about a candidate's ability to handle certain responsibilities or perform certain jobs, but asking about disabilities or illnesses of any sort is not the way find out (legally, at least).
4. **ASK:** Are you a USA Gymnastics Member? Are you a member of any professional or trade groups that are relevant to our industry? **Not:** Do you belong to any clubs or social organizations? You might simply be trying to learn about a candidate's interest and activities outside of work, but a general question about organizational membership could tap into a candidate's political and religious affiliations or other personal matters.
5. **ASK:** Have you ever been convicted of "x" [something that is substantially related to the job]? **Not:** Have you ever been arrested? Questions about arrests or pending charges for jobs that are NOT substantially related to the particular job are off-limits.
6. **ASK:** What are your long-term career goals? **Not:** How much longer do you plan to work before you retire? While you may not want to hire an older worker who will retire in a few years, you can't dismiss an applicant for this reason.
7. **ASK:** Are you available to work overtime on occasion? Can you travel? **Not:** Do you have children? or Can you get a babysitter on short notice for overtime or travel? You might be concerned that family obligations will get in the way of work, but you can't ask or make assumptions about family situations. Cut to the chase by asking directly about the candidate's availability.

8. **ASK: Are you available to work within our required schedule?** Not: What religion do you practice? or What religious holidays do you observe? Again, you might simply be trying to discern a candidate's availability, but leave religion out of it.
9. **ASK: Are you over the age of 18?** Not: How old are you? or When did you graduate from college? If you know a candidate's age, you could find yourself facing discrimination charges at some point. Your only concern should be as to whether the candidate is legally old enough to work for your organization.
10. **ASK: Is additional information, such as a different name or nickname necessary in order to check job references?** Not: Is this your maiden name? or Do you prefer to be called "Ms.," "Miss," or "Mrs.?" Be sure to avoid any question that alludes to a woman's marital status – as well as anything that could be construed as a question referring to national origin or ancestry (e.g. "Your name is interesting. What nationality is it?").

When in doubt...keep it work-related. If employers can phrase questions so that they directly relate to specific occupational qualifications, then the questions may be legitimate ones.

Employment Principles

Some people may call them Value Statements but best practices dictate that employment principles such as these be created for any organization. Use them to help find the right people to hire and hold those people accountable for adhering to these principles. Oftentimes gymnastics business owners hire the coach with the most skill and background in gymnastics; these people may have the skills of the job but not the personality and character needed to represent your organization or help you attain your business goals.

The key is to hire the personality and train that personality with the skills of the job. A good staff will be an effective and efficient team working together toward a common objective.

- **Honesty** – The hallmark of character, honesty is the core principle of any employment.
- **Respect** – Respect must be unconditional. Never allow a staff member to talk down to a parent or a child or a co-worker.
- **Open Communication** – No matter what the situation; happy parents, unhappy kids, complacent staff – the key is communication. Communicate early and often; don't wait for big problems; communicate observations (not opinions). Be a good listener that strives to understand. Focus the

communication on the issue; engage in "critical conversations."

- **Teamwork** – Working together toward a common goal defines a team. Every member of your team should know and share your values and be expected to contribute to the success of your organization's mission.
- **Growth** – Expand personal horizons; continue education constantly; never stop learning.
- **Mission** – Staff should be expected to create a personal mission statement for themselves and then have the integrity to follow it. It should be your intent as the employer to hire individuals whose mission in life will help you realize your club's vision.

Managing a Multi-Generational Workforce

The 21st Century workplace is a multicultural, multigenerational environment. Each culture and generation brings different values, beliefs and behaviors. Our parents, or grandparents, might have found women and men working side by side in the workplace unusual or improper. Nowadays, multi-ethnic and multigenerational workforces are the norm. Being respectful of individual differences, even when they pose challenges, is part of today's job.

For the first time in history, it is likely that as many as four generations are working together in your workplace. This makes generational diversity a greater challenge in the current marketplace and workplace. This reality demands that we understand the different perspectives of four generations of workers just to accomplish our everyday work. Common experiences within generations tend to affect their attitudes, expectations, and values concerning work. The experiences of people in their twenties are markedly different than those who have worked for over 30 years. We may have "senior citizens" running our front offices with "baby boomers" and teenagers teaching our classes, each generation with attitudes and expectations quite different from each other.

Issues that have created increased generational conflict include the economy, outsourcing, industry consolidation, layoffs, increased communication and technology advances. Add to that the different value systems of each generation, and it becomes difficult for managers and colleagues to know how to treat two workers in the same job if they are different ages. Differences in value systems can impact ambitions, perspectives, behavioral norms, and emotional reactions to various work scenarios. Communications can also be tricky, since each generation is motivated by different workplace messages.

Information to help you communicate across generational gaps:

- Traditionalists, born before 1945, comprise about 15% of the workforce. These workers lived through the Depression and two world wars. They tend to trust authority, respect rules, and follow the chain of command. Valuing loyalty, they are loyal to institutions. They look for courtesy and respect, have a strong work ethic, and expect mutual accountability.
- Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, make up almost half of the labor force. They grew up with traditional values, and then watched their work lives crumble with layoffs and reduced benefits. Boomers tend to have a strong work ethic and hold many senior-level management positions. As a group they rebelled against authority then accepted it to attain financial security in their highly competitive, over-supplied age group. They like recognition and prefer to be asked vs. told. They want others to value their experience and their work ethic.
- Gen X's, born between 1964 and 1982, are about 33% of the workforce. This group grew up with computer technology. They tend to educate themselves and have high expectations. Gen X's want multiple career paths, choices, and a voice in what's going on at work. They are collaborative, care about security, and don't like being micromanaged. They want to be left to do their work while multi-tasking, which they do well. This group values time off and work/life balance.
- The Millennials, aka Generation Y, were born between 1982 and 2000 and have been surrounded by computer technology since birth. Millennials are used to sound bites and Internet speed. They have integrated social with technological networking so seamlessly that most do not distinguish between the two. They do not respect workplaces that do not use the technology they view as essential to their existence. They have a casual, participative style and prefer teams. They may not recognize older generational strengths and tend to discount those not technologically savvy.

Do not assume others are like you in age or style. Simply because someone falls within these birth years does not necessarily mean they will exhibit all or even some of these traits. Ask questions about their differences in preferences and values. Then, attempt to treat others according to how they want to be treated, not how you want to be treated.

The most productive and cohesive teams are composed of members representing a diversity of styles, ages, and other elements of diversity. Diversity brings richness

to the workplace. As effective leaders, we need to take stock of and improve our own styles and generational preferences, and we must coach others to do the same. To get the most out of our staffs, we need to learn to motivate them according to their needs. This includes learning to appreciate and work with all generations, rewarding them appropriately, and coaching them to strive for their fullest potential.

Organizational Leadership

Management studies have shown that supervisors spend more than 85% of their time on people issues and less than 15% of their day on the technical aspects of their jobs. Wouldn't we all like to have an organization filled with effective staff that worked together toward higher performance? An organization where people not only saw a job to be done and did it, but continually searched out for ways to improve operations? We are all looking for an organization filled with leaders.

The Harvard School of Business has identified 5 stages of leadership; those who have no leadership skills and only follow leaders, those who lead themselves, leaders of small groups, leaders of large groups, and those who develop leadership skills in others. It may be tempting to try and surround yourself with the first group of people who only follow your lead. Is that what you are really looking for? An organization where every direction has to come through you and no decisions made or action is taken without your approval?

Personally, I do not like to have to deal with every refund request, every scheduling decision and every operational situation. I would much rather have my employees take responsibility, show initiative, and make decisions that leave me to work on the vision and action plans for our program. So how do you create leaders that can make good decisions and act with responsibility?

True leaders have learned not to confuse being busy with being productive. Good leaders not only have developed the organizational and technical skills to be successful at what they do, but also the skills to deal with many personalities to get the most out of the people around them. Great leaders realize they can't do everything themselves; that they can do more with the help of others. Most importantly, they not only lead, they develop leadership in others.

Animals behave in set patterns, which is why we are able to track and hunt them. Only man has the capacity to consciously alter his behavior to overcome routine and habit. Most people do not exercise this power. Many people prefer the comforts of routine, giving in to our nature that makes us repeat the same compulsive

actions over and over again. It requires very little thought or effort and it is easier to maintain the status quo and not be bothered.

Not everyone is a born leader, but anyone can become a leader. It is not easy for everyone to step outside their regular patterns of behavior and take charge. There are four reasons for people to change: out of fear, out of pain, out of love, or out of intent to improve their position. Understanding that, you could threaten your employees to become leaders or you can encourage them to develop skills by rewarding them. The best organizations are filled with leaders who share a vision, and love what they do. They are self-motivated individuals who want to be the best that they can be. The challenge is to surround yourself with people who love what they do enough to want to raise up to a leadership role and are driven to be the best at whatever it is that they are doing. The organization's leader then must empower, enable, and encourage decision-making, problem solving and autonomy.

To create an organization full of leaders, you must begin by being a strong leader yourself. Being a leader requires you have the big picture in mind, so you must avoid being distracted by the minutia of life and of your club. Becoming buried in the detail is a sure-fire way of missing the larger point. There's a need to focus on the more important strategic issues, while allowing the front-line worker gain the necessary knowledge and competence to develop the skills to fulfill a general role, and deal with the detail.

A strong leader will create a shared vision. By having a mission and let everyone around you know what that mission is, you and your staff are able to develop a plan to accomplish those goals. Make sure the objectives are reasonably obtainable. Develop an action plan that is specific with standards that support the goals and expectations. Once you can articulate your vision and mission, you can find people who share your have a similar philosophy and can help you reach your goals.

Gym owners typically know how their business works best, the mechanics of the way things get done, what will work and why some things fail. Spread the knowledge to your staff! It will ensure that decision-making is informed and well thought out. The best leaders understand that they don't have all the answers; rather, they know how to ask the right questions:

- Why do you think that's a good idea?
- What would happen if we did that?
- Who would be responsible for that?

Remember, in return, people have a right to ask leaders:

- What do you believe?
- What can I expect of YOU?
- Can I achieve MY goals by following you?
- Have you bothered to prepare yourself to lead?
- Are you ready to be ruthlessly honest?
- Can I totally trust you?
- Do you have the trust in me to let me do my job?

If you can honestly respond to these questions, you can begin to develop leadership in the people that are following you. A leader who is in tune with what is truly meaningful for him or her is able to create a more compelling vision. Effective leaders are self-aware, at least on an intuitive level. The more a leader understands himself or herself, the more he or she can tolerate negative feedback; and the more he or she becomes comfortable with not having all the answers, the greater the chance of creating an environment where subordinates are comfortable being forthright regarding their perspectives and feedback. You will be able to ask them the same questions. Hold them accountable for their personal mission. Ask yourself if you wouldn't rather have an organization of leaders that leave you free to lead your organization.

Employee or Independent Contractor

A number of laws govern whether a worker is an independent contractor or an employee, and each of these laws has a different way of looking at the issue. For example, the IRS has one method of determining whether a person is an independent contractor, but your state workers' compensation board may use a different test.

Because of all these different laws, often referred to as "worker classification" rules, the issue of whether a worker is an independent contractor is not one question, but many. Employers who don't take the time to learn the rules before they hire an independent contractor can get hopelessly confused -- and this confusion can lead to trouble with one agency or another. If you want to avoid problems such as fines and taxes, know the rules before you hire a worker.

Internal Revenue Service

The IRS is probably the most important agency to satisfy when it comes to classifying a worker as an independent contractor. The IRS currently uses a 20-factor "test" to determine whether a worker is an independent contractor or an employee. Under this IRS litmus test, workers are considered employees if the company they work for has the right to direct and

control the way they work - including the details of when, where, and how the job is accomplished. This checklist is not precise; there is no special number of factors that a company must pass in order to prove independent contractor status. The IRS will consider workers independent contractors if the company they work for does not manage how they work, except to accept or reject their final results.

The IRS looks at a number of factors when determining whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor. The agency is more likely to classify as an independent contractor a worker who:

- Can earn a profit or suffer a loss from the activity
- Furnishes the tools and materials needed to do the work
- Is paid by the job
- Works for more than one gym at a time
- Invests in their own equipment and facilities
- Pays his or her own business and traveling expenses
- Hires and pays assistants
- Sets their working hours.

On the other hand, the IRS is more likely to classify as an employee a worker who:

- Can be fired at any time by the gym
- Is paid by the hour
- Receives instructions from the hiring gym
- Receives training from the hiring gym
- Works full time for the hiring gym
- Receives employee benefits
- Has the right to quit without incurring liability
- Provides services that are an integral part of the hiring gym's day-to-day operations.

If you believe the IRS would consider the worker a contractor, you don't have to withhold federal payroll taxes for the worker, including Social Security taxes, federal disability taxes and federal income taxes. If the IRS would not consider the worker an independent contractor, then you should withhold these taxes.

If you decide to contract a worker, have all potential workers fill out a questionnaire regarding their independent contractor status before you hire them, and collect documents from them proving they are indeed independent contractors (for example, advertisements, invoices from other companies, professional licenses, insurance certificates, and tax returns).

State Unemployment Compensation Board

If the worker meets your state unemployment

compensation board's definition of independent contractor, you don't have to pay for unemployment insurance for the worker. If the worker does not meet this test, you should provide unemployment coverage for the worker, even if the worker qualifies as an independent contractor under tests used by other agencies, such as the IRS.

To learn more about your state unemployment department's test, go to your state unemployment compensation board or your state department of labor. If a worker whom you treat as an independent contractor decides to apply for unemployment compensation - which is reserved for employees - it will be your word against the worker's. You say the worker was an independent contractor, but the worker - hungry for that unemployment check - says otherwise. In such a situation, you'd better be prepared to back up your claim with documentation.

State Workers' Compensation Insurance Agency

If a worker meets your state workers' compensation agency definition of independent contractor, you don't have to pay for workers' compensation coverage for that worker. Otherwise, you should pay for workers' compensation coverage, even if the worker qualifies as an independent contractor under other tests, such as the IRS test or your state unemployment board test.

To find out more about the workers' compensation test in your state, contact your state department of industrial relations or your state labor department. Your local office of the Small Business Administration might also have information on the subject.

If an independent contractor is injured on the job and applies for workers' compensation - something reserved for employees - you might find yourself with an audit on your hands. You should be prepared from the beginning to prove that the worker was an independent contractor under the workers' compensation board's test.

State Tax Department

If your state collects income tax, then you need to familiarize yourself with your state tax department's rules regarding independent contractors. If the worker will qualify as an independent contractor under your state tax department's test, you do not need to withhold state income taxes from money that you pay the worker. Otherwise, you should withhold state taxes, even if the worker qualifies as an independent contractor under other tests, such as the IRS test or the workers' compensation test. Contact your state tax board for details.

United States Department of Labor

Finally, if the US Department of Labor would consider a worker an independent contractor, you don't need to pay the worker overtime when the worker works more than 40 hours in a week. Otherwise, you should pay the worker overtime, even if the worker would qualify as an independent contractor under other tests, such as the IRS test or your state tax department's test.

Confusing isn't it? My advice to gym owners is to take a realistic and unbiased look at the business and run your own evaluation against the checklists of independent contractor criteria. In most states, it is often the best practice to simply hire hourly or salaried employees. When is all said and done, you CAN (maybe) run your business with independent contractors but you will need to be very careful about how you run your operation. Don't enter into this decision without a lot of research and legal direction.

Safety Practices in Hiring Staff

According to the U. S. Department of Justice, about 25 percent of prisoners who victimized children had prior convictions for violent crimes; on average, pedophiles victimize 117 children in their lifetime before being caught; between 2 and 5 percent of teachers sexually abuse or harass students. It is reported that a child is sexually abused every six seconds. Three of four child victims of violence are female; more than half of the violent crimes committed against children involved victims under the age of 12.

Just like why bank robbers rob banks - ("That's where the money is." Willy Sutton), sexual predators, abusers, pedophiles and other deviants will be attracted to gymnastics programs - because that's where the kids are. To protect the children in your programs and to reduce your risk, criminal background checks should be conducted for all employees that come into contact with your students. Teachers, coaches, directors, office staff and even volunteers should be subjected to checks. We owe society an environment that follows best practices in making sure the children in our care are as safe and secure as possible.

There is a cost involved for investigating the background of a potential employee, but weigh that cost against the cost of a lawsuit or the damage done to your reputation, not to mention the physical and emotional damage done to an innocent child, if you were to hire the wrong person.

Perform diligent reference checks on all potential employees. Don't just call the last employer listed on the application; contact at least three character references for each candidate. You can be proud of the benefits you provide the children and families in your program. You work hard to keep your business running; finding and keeping good employees is one of the toughest parts of running a business. You have probably heard other people tell you that it is better to be understaffed than to be poorly staffed; it is true - do not hire the wrong people!

Preventing Child Abuse

In 1974 the first Federal child protection legislation, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was passed to ensure the safety and welfare of children. Today, the Child Abuse Prevention Initiative is an opportunity for communities across the country to keep children safe, provide the support that families need to stay together, and raise children and youth to be happy, secure, and stable adults.

Prevention is the best hope for reducing child abuse and neglect and improving the lives of children and families. Strengthening families and preventing child abuse requires a shared commitment of individuals and organizations in every community. The best way to prevent child abuse is to help parents develop the skills and identify the resources they need to understand and meet their children's needs and protect them from harm.

The first step in helping abused children is learning to recognize the symptoms of child abuse and emotional maltreatment. The types are more typically found in combination than alone. A physically abused child for example is often emotionally maltreated as well and a sexually abused child may also be neglected. Any child at any age may experience any of the types of child abuse. Children over age five are more likely to be physically abused and to suffer moderate injury than are children under age five.

Recognizing child abuse alert signs like these may signal the presence of child abuse. Below are some ways to help prevent child abuse:

- Be a nurturing parent children need to know that they are special, loved and capable of following their dreams.
- Help a friend, neighbor or relative. Being a parent



isn't easy. Offer a helping hand to take care of the children, so the parent (s) can rest or spend time together.

- Help yourself. When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point you feel overwhelmed and out of control take time out. Don't take it out on your child.
- Never shake a baby. Shaking a child may result in severe injury or death.
- Get involved. Ask your community leaders, clergy, library and schools to develop services to meet the needs of healthy children and families.
- Monitor your child's television and video viewing. Watching violent films and TV programs can harm young children.
- Volunteer at a local child abuse prevention program. For information about volunteer opportunities, call 1-800-CHILDREN.

Report suspected abuse or neglect; if you have reason to believe a child has been or may be harmed, call your local County Department of Children and Family Services or your local police department.

USA Gymnastics Background Checks

USA Gymnastics is a youth sports organization, and gymnastics is one of the country's most popular sports, especially for girls and young women. Providing a safe, clean, and fun environment is important for the sport to continue to grow and thrive. Parents must have the highest degree of confidence that their children are not only receiving good care and proper instruction, but also are safe from negative and improper conduct. These basic tenets are crucial to maintaining a positive image in the community and a good reputation, both in local communities and as an activity nation-wide, especially since 98 percent of our athlete members are less than 18 years of age.

Professional membership in USA Gymnastics is the gold standard, an indicator that the person or organization has committed the time, interest and hard work into being the best they can be. This membership should be a distinction that parents look for and depend upon to know that they are placing their children into well-trained and professional hands.

The responsibilities of an organization that provides activities for children and young adults include protecting the safety and welfare of its athletes and participants. USA Gymnastics has already mandated a safety certification program, which provides professional members with a working knowledge of how to conduct gymnastics activities in a safe environment. Also, USA

Gymnastics has a zero-tolerance policy on abuse and other inappropriate behavior with an athlete. USA Gymnastics is now requiring background reference check screening of professional members to support this policy, and in response to inquiries for this service from gym club owners. Background checks are becoming commonplace with many youth organizations and institutions and are endorsed by the U.S. Olympic Committee.

Through the National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI), all professional members will have the endorsement of completing a successful background check for previous criminal behavior, which may be inappropriate for contact with children. Screening covers criminal background, sex offender registry and identity verification. USA Gymnastics has worked hard with NCSI to develop a program that is affordable, and the fees cover the costs for this service. This is not a profit center for USA Gymnastics. The monies go to, and remain with NCSI. This is a major undertaking for USA Gymnastics, but this program is an important part of providing a safe environment for our athletes, which is the responsibility of every member.

USA Gymnastics is proud of the new Clubs Care initiative to bring awareness of child abuse and its prevention to the public. USA Gymnastics also has a working partnership with the United States Olympic Committee's Safe Sport program, the Positive Coaching Alliance, and the We Care campaign to ensure a safe and secure environment for participants and its members.

US Olympic Committee Safe Sport Program

Athletes will perform better, soar higher, and get more from sport if they feel safe. SafeSport (www.safesport.org) seeks to create a healthy, supportive environment for all participants. Through education, resources, and training, Safe Sport helps members of the sport community recognize, reduce, and respond to misconduct in sport.

Misconduct includes child sexual abuse, bullying, hazing, and harassment, emotional, and physical abuse. The SafeSport program is the culmination of sustained work on the part of a number of passionate individuals. In 2010, the US Olympic Committee (USOC) convened the Working Group for Safe Training Environments and charged it with the task of developing a set of recommendations concerning misconduct in sport. The diverse group, which included individuals from the Olympic Family as well as external experts, focused on four primary objectives:

- Addressing sexual and physical misconduct in sport
- Reviewing the guidelines across sports and other related organizations for responding to these issues
- Assessing the needs of athletes, coaches, staff, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), clubs and other sport organizations
- Developing a set of recommendations to promote athlete well-being

Based on the group's report, the USOC founded the SafeSport program to address misconduct in sport by providing information, training, and resources.

USA Gymnastics We Care Campaign

USA Gymnastics is proud to announce the We Care Campaign, an educational program designed specifically for parents and concerned adults that focuses on establishing and maintaining a safe gymnastics environment in your club.

The We Care Campaign is created to help individuals be more aware of the issue of child sexual abuse, and then suggest ways one can turn that awareness into action. The We Care education-focused efforts complement the steps USA Gymnastics already has taken to promote a safe environment for its athletes through policy and guideline changes implemented in the last few years. Here's a quick overview of what is currently in place.

- **Clubs Care Campaign** – on a monthly basis the Clubs Care Campaign will deliver information, strategies, templates, toolkits, checklists, action steps, posters, etc., directly to gymnastics clubs through a variety of avenues, including email, Technique magazine, www.usagym.org/ClubsCare, and the U.S. Postal Service. Clubs can use these materials to develop or refine policies and procedures geared toward eliminating the opportunity for inappropriate behavior or sexual misconduct to occur.
- **Participant Welfare Policy** – provides guidance on how clubs, coaches and parents can work together to provide a safe environment, as well as requirements and expectations of USA Gymnastics' members. The topics covered in the policy include: definitions of abuse used by USA Gymnastics for both physical and sexual abuse; reporting procedures and requirements for suspected abuse;

misconduct/grievance procedures; member obligations and recommendations, as well as staff; standards of behavior; and education and communication about the policy to members and the general public.

Mandatory criminal background screening and safety/risk management certification for professional members – background screening is renewed every two years; safety/risk management certification is renewed every four years.

Tuberculosis Testing

On a similar note, but a matter that is nearly as important as background checks, is the health screening of staff. All employees who have contact with children (HHMM, sounds like everyone in the gym!) should be tested for tuberculosis. A simple TB test can be performed in your doctor's office or local clinic, takes only a few minutes and is an easy best practice to follow. Herpes simplex, hepatitis, conjunctivitis, impetigo, and meningitis are common contagious diseases - making sure that your staff is not responsible for spreading communicable disease is a responsibility to be taken seriously.

In the event of a contagious disease exposure, do the right thing and communicate that exposure to your clientele' – every school sends home notices of lice outbreaks, it is not unreasonable for your gym to be exposed as well. You owe it to your customers to be responsible and respond appropriately.

You also have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for all of the employees. Included in the Appendix are sample Injury and Illness Prevention Plan, Anti-Harassment Policy, Violence Prevention Policy, and Workplace Policy documents for you to consider.

Post Hiring Orientation and Training

Following your application process, extensive reference checks, fingerprint screening, and interviews, conduct adequate orientation and training. Proper training may include written materials, quizzes, shadowing other staff, or videos. Use a checklist to make sure nothing is overlooked, and then include that checklist in the employee's file.



USA Gymnastics University

USA Gymnastics University is a collection of resources for gymnastics education. The University, with emphasis on the proper development of gymnastics participants in a positive and safe environment, provides greater educational opportunities for coaches, instructors, teachers, judges, and administrators at all levels and in all disciplines of gymnastics. Included as a part of the University are educational courses and programs, technical materials and publications, and a professional certification. There are four schools of study within the University – Competitive Gymnastics, Recreational Gymnastics, Business, and Judging.

Each school is divided into several different tiers to which one may complete the specified certificate program. They are progressive and completion of one tier is required prior to obtaining the next level. Coursework for the next certificate program can be pursued at any time.

The certificate program is comprised of designated “core” course work and school specific courses. Courses and other requirements vary depending on the school of study and specific certificate program. For additional information and a complete University Course Catalog, click [HERE](#).

Regardless of what area of study one chooses, everyone within the university must:

- Successfully complete U100: Fundamental Of Gymnastics Instruction Course (online)
- Be a current USA Gymnastics Member (Professional, Junior Professional, Instructor, Athlete).
- Have a current background check with NCSI (18 years and older)
- Be responsible for knowing the course requirements for the certificate they are pursuing. (While course requirements can and will change for different certification types, those who have already received the certification will maintain as active/current certifications)

Employee Overtime

I don't know many gymnastics professionals that have a 9-to-5 workweek. Whether it's coaches at meets on the weekend, private lessons, birthday parties, just plain expanded hours to serve customers, many gym owners and managers are finding that it's necessary to ask employees to work overtime and flexible, varied hours.

These varied schedules and flexible work hours can create an employer nightmare. Exactly what can employers require of employees' time? Is it possible to “require” them to attend events outside of their typical work hours? Only if you are careful in the communication of that requirement.

If employees might ever be expected or required to be present at any kind of event after their normal working hours, it's a good idea to include details about such circumstances in their job description. Simply adding a phrase, such as, “During busy periods, we may require employees to work extended hours,” to a job description can warn employees that they may be asked to work extra hours. For example, if you regularly send coaches to long meets (and aren't they all sometimes?), alert new staff of the likelihood that they may be putting in extra hours to prepare for and attend the event, travel, etc.

All non-exempt workers should be compensated for work hours as required by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). You should also be familiar with any applicable local and/or state laws governing overtime. It's also imperative to keep detailed records of hours worked, as the burden of proof often lies with the employer if an employee should file a claim for damages.

Many employees welcome the additional income of overtime and are happy to spend the extra hours at work to earn it. Unless there is no other option, don't enact mandatory overtime. Asking for volunteers to work overtime is always advisable.

Mandatory attendance at a lunch or dinner meeting would fall into the category of overtime, as the employee has lost their FLSA mandated breaks. Training is another scenario where many gym owners may find themselves asking coaches and other staff to put in extra hours.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) time spent in training is considered to be work if it is:

- Approved by a manager.
- Directly related to the employee's job.
- Designed to enhance the employee's performance.

For example, an employee who opts to take a college course wouldn't be eligible for overtime, even if the



gym were offering tuition reimbursement. However, an employee enrolled in a safety-training program at the request of a manager would be eligible.

Communication and common sense can aid gym owners and managers when defining best practices in dealing with employees working extraneous hours. If employers alert employees to the possibility that their presence is required at after hour's events well in advance and compensate them fairly for their time, there is little chance that there will be any negative repercussions. When in doubt, check with a labor attorney.

Vacations and Time Off Requests

With staff vacation and time off requests, you need to be ready if your gym can't function well without at least one of your key employees present. Having a clear vacation request policy in place can not only keep your staff schedules organized, but it can also prevent lapses in scheduling.

A time off policy is easy to draft and can be as simple as a few paragraphs in the employee handbook. Best practices include how employees request time off. Is there a written form, or is an e-mail to the gym owner/director/manager sufficient? Some gyms simply ask employees to indicate when they will be on vacation on a shared calendar. It should be clear to staff how to ask for time off and how they will receive approval.

First of all, make it clear how your employees accrue paid time off. Whether it's a certain number of hours per pay period, or days per year, state how employees will accrue paid time off. You should also decide if you will allow employees to "roll over" some or all of their paid time off to the next year or if their paid time off will expire. It should also be noted whether or not employees will be able to "cash out" unused paid time off at the end of employment. (Note: In CA businesses must pay unused PTO, check with your attorney about other states).

Don't forget to include a rejection of time-off provision. Most importantly, gym owners should state that it might not be possible to grant all employee vacation requests. It would be great if everyone could be on vacation for the last two weeks of December or right after summer camps, but the reality is that someone has to be there to take registrations, answer the phone, and teach classes.

Determine when employees should ask for their vacation time. Some gyms find that asking employees to request vacation time at the beginning of a year or

quarter best allows managers to ensure the requests don't overlap. Others give more tenured employees preference when approving requests. Obviously each gym has its own nuances. You should determine the system that best suits your program and employees, and present the policy to staff.

No matter how diversified or homogenous the cultures and religions may be among your employees, there will inevitably be times when a majority will request time off to observe a religious holiday. Whether it's Christmas Day, the beginning of Ramadan or Rosh Hashanah, each religion has designated holy days. Employers should recognize and respect all holidays to maintain U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) compliance.

Many gyms opt to follow the pre-set list of holidays set forth by the federal government when it comes to determining what days to close. However, only offering traditional Christian holidays can be problematic for employers. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids religious discrimination and requires employers to provide "reasonable accommodation," such as granting an employee time off to observe a religious holiday.

The EEOC does not require employers to accommodate an employee's religious beliefs and practices if doing so would impose an undue hardship on the employers' legitimate business interests such as:

- Excessive administrative costs
- Diminished efficiency in other jobs
- Infringement on other employees' job rights or benefits
- Workplace safety impairment
- Co-workers having to carry the accommodated employee's share of potentially hazardous or burdensome work
- Accommodations that cause conflict with another law or regulation

Such situations can become difficult when an unacceptable number of employees request time off for religious holidays. Employers should have a clearly outlined policy as to how conflicting requests will be handled. Some gyms adopt a "first come, first served" approach to requests; others use seniority to decide which employees will be granted their paid time off requests. A published policy can protect employers from claims of discrimination.

Accurate job descriptions can also shield employers against claims of religious discrimination. If a job may or will require an employee to work weekends or

holidays, state so in the description. A worker cannot argue that they were discriminated against if the position they were hired for requires working on certain days or holidays.

When employees are enjoying paid time off, you should not contact them if at all possible. Prior to planned vacations, ask workers to be sure substitute staff is aware of all their duties and responsibilities. Contacting employees while they are not being paid to work and asking them to spend personal time for business matters is a violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), a federal law that requires employers to pay employees for all time worked. While a quick phone call to ask where to find a lesson plan may not offend a person, repeated e-mails or phone calls are not just rude but violate FLSA if the employee isn't compensated for their time.

Employee Evaluations

Most supervisors / directors / managers are tasked with the annual event of completing a performance review and appraisal for each of their employees. Not only must supervisors rate an employee in multiple competencies, but also more importantly, they must communicate organizational expectations to the employee.

Two words that help to communicate where an employee stands throughout the year and during the review of an employee's performance during the appraisal process are: "*For example.*"

A recent Administaff survey revealed that nearly 8 in 10 companies conduct performance appraisals. Of these companies, 72 percent were not satisfied with the process. While there are many reasons for a company to be unsatisfied with its process, there usually is only one reason that employees are generally unsatisfied: the supervisor's rating is not as high as the employee believes it should be.

As a supervisor, it is important to paint a picture for an employee that he or she can relate to and that will clearly reflect a particular attitude/behavior. When you review the rating you have selected for an employee's competency level, be certain that you can support that decision with two to three specific examples. You should be able to adjust those examples to convey how achieving a point or two higher rating would have been exhibited.

Often supervisors don't spend as much time and effort in communicating the results of a performance appraisal review with an employee as they do in preparing it. However, communication is the key to a

successful relationship with the employee. Spend the time to give constructive feedback.

Communication does not begin at the end of the review process, but rather at the beginning. Clear expectations should be set from the first day of the supervisor/employee relationship. Expectations should include not only what the standards for the position are and the level of performance required, but should also include how to reach beyond the standard to achieve excellence.

Communicating these expectations on an on-going basis provides an opportunity to clarify expectations, redirect behavior, and collaborate on solutions. Adhering to these actions constantly and consistently throughout the year will ultimately shape the outcome of the performance appraisal review and make it a non-threatening event.

While every performance appraisal form may be different and rating scales may use a variety of terms to distinguish average performers from superior performers, eventually the words will have little meaning to employees because they will know which bucket they fall into. However, including the phrase "for example" in your supporting comments provides more depth to the employee's understanding of their current status and how to achieve a higher standing.

The words "for example" emphasizes to the employee that your explanation is a well-thought-out remark, concern or rating. It reinforces to the employee that this is not simply an arbitrary number that has been selected or a subjective director/manager's opinion. As a supervisor, these words provide a way for you to validate and structure your assessment and put your conclusions into action. With the use of these two simple words, employees will have a clear understanding of the rating that you have assigned to the competency as well as how to improve, which instills in the employee that the rating is fair, objective and constructive.

360-degree evaluations are an excellent way to review employee performance. Distributing 360 forms to supervisors, co-workers, subordinates, outside vendors, parents, etc. gives a complete picture of how an employee is seen by others, rather than relying only on the impression and observations of the supervisor. Likewise, staff should have an opportunity to provide feedback on their supervisor.

Positive Coaching Your Staff

If you're looking for a best practice you can use to get rid of all the problems in your gym, forget it...there isn't

one. But there is a practice that comes closer than you might believe possible. It's called positive coaching and it can seriously reduce the number of mistakes and miscommunications in your company, which in turn can improve profits.

Positive coaching—which includes carefully describing both the desired results and how to achieve them before the work begins—gives employees a great opportunity to move their performance from average to excellent. Unfortunately, because managers often mistakenly believe that employees already understand the process, they fail to coach beforehand.

Here are some steps owners / managers can take to improve their coaching skills:

- Allow plenty of time for questions and explanations before the work begins. Recognize the truth in the old laugh line, "I know you think that you understand what I said but what you heard is not what I meant." Say the same thing in several different ways and ask questions to make sure to be sure you're understood.
- Set clear performance expectations that fall within your employees' ability levels, and then challenge them to outperform themselves. Challenges show employees you have confidence in their abilities and can see their potential for excellence.
- Provide ample opportunities to practice new skills. Don't expect anyone to perform a task well the first time. All learning is really recognition, or repeating an initial understanding.
- Help each individual in your group to do his or her best by monitoring progress and providing positive feedback. Share knowledge, and assign tasks and responsibilities that encourage employees to stretch their abilities.
- Hold employees accountable for the work they do. Praise employees whose performances meet and exceed expectations, and discuss improvement plans with poor performers.
- Be a catalyst for group success by helping employees to work well with each other. Organize work groups so that each person can perform at his or her optimum level. Partner employees with compatible personalities whenever possible.
- Remember that the goal is improving the employee's performance, not outperforming the employee. Good coaches support their players; they do not compete with them. Managers don't need to be better at doing employees' jobs or superior to others in the group, and those who try

to meet those standards usually fail to develop their managerial skills.

- Use the leadership style most appropriate for the person or group you're coaching. Avoid making a false distinction between management and leadership. Management is what you do and leadership is how you do it.

I often hear owners and managers say things like they don't have time to deal with employee issues because they have too much work to do. Those people somehow segregate their human resources/personnel duties from their gym duties and fail to realize that employee management IS their job. 85% of your success is attributed to how you relate to other people; only 15% of your success is the result of technical skills.

Another effective technique of positive coaching staff is turning employees into advocates for your business. This may depend on whether you use power or influence to accomplish tasks. There's nothing wrong with using power if the situation requires it. But, power is often used when it is not needed, and the unintended results can be costly, creating a silent adversary. By contrast, influence recognizes and respects the individual, who can become a dedicated advocate.

For example, let's say your gym has just added a new tumbling class. You could accomplish the task by telling your coaches the day and time of the class, the fee you will be charging, how many students you need and what you want them taught. That's a power approach. It will probably get the class, but it may not provide what you really want, which is a positive work environment that helps employees perform their jobs in the most productive fashion.

On the other hand, you could say to your teachers, "We want a new tumbling class, with lots of happy children learning power skills. Please tell me what you can provide that will help us create a session that our students and coaches will enjoy and which enhances productivity." By asking for help, you have influenced the staff to collaborate with you to realize one of your company's primary goals.

Power that is exercised insensitively is received by many people as coercive, which often instill fear. By contrast, influence speaks politely and asks questions, which promotes understanding and creates collaboration between the two parties... positive coaching! Exercising influence works in relationships, and is as just effective at gaining the support and help of employees as it is with customers.

In today's cross-functional workplace, managers frequently find themselves working with peers from other departments. While it is important to understand what other departments do, it is even more important that inter-departmental interactions are smooth and satisfactory to everyone concerned. If you want to influence your peers in a certain way, ask questions so you can understand their needs, and then formulate your action plan so that it is a win-win proposition for all involved. Try influencing your employees, you'll see just how powerful influence can be.

Finally, recognize that to coach someone effectively, you must genuinely care about the person as much as you do the outcome. Managing people today means finding effective ways to help them release their talents and realize their potential for success—the exact same things that people who coach winning teams do.

Mentorship in Gymnastics Organizations

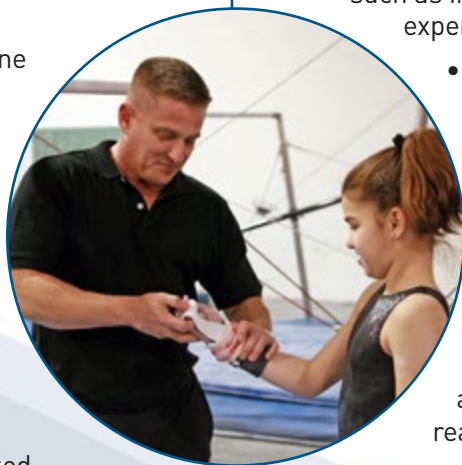
By definition, a mentor is a close, trusted, and experienced counselor or guide. A mentor is further defined as a teacher, tutor, and coach. Mentorship is defined as the influence, guidance, or direction exerted by a mentor. Much like a coach guides and assists their gymnasts; mentors provide direction and assistance to others. Modern use of mentor refers to an experienced, senior leader or manager who develops younger, less experienced leaders and provides career counseling and sponsorship to these individuals.

Mentorship contributes to the development of these future leaders. Mentorship is a two-way street. The mentor must be willing to share knowledge, training, and experience in a trusted and respected atmosphere. In turn, the individual receiving the mentorship must trust and respect the mentor, while being open and receptive to the process. Caring is the core of mentorship. A mentor may care as a parent cares. We must remember that mentorship means taking some risks, to include allowing our mentee to make mistakes during their training. Mentors risk disappointment, failure, and rejection.

We need to clarify their goals and help develop long-term career strategies toward advancement. We should also aid in developing their short-term career plans. We must share our knowledge and instruct them in technical, leadership and management skills.

Mentoring is a tool that organizations can use to nurture and grow their people. It can be an informal practice or a formal program. Mentors demonstrate, explain and model. Mentees observe, question, and explore. The following assumptions form the foundation for a solid mentoring program.

- Deliberate learning is the cornerstone. The mentor's job is to promote intentional learning, which includes capacity building through methods such as instructing, coaching, providing experiences, modeling and advising.
- Both failure and success are powerful teachers. Mentors, as leaders of a learning experience, certainly need to share their "how to do it so it comes out right" stories. They also need to share their experiences of failure, i.e., "how I did it wrong". Both types of stories are powerful lessons that provide valuable opportunities for analyzing individual and organizational realities.
- Leaders need to tell their stories. Personal scenarios, anecdotes and case examples, because they offer valuable, often unforgettable insight, must be shared. Mentors who can talk about themselves and their experiences establish a rapport that makes them "learning leaders."
- Development matures over time. Mentoring - when it works - taps into continuous learning that is not an event, or even a string of discrete events. Rather, it is the synthesis of ongoing event, experiences, observation, studies, and thoughtful analyses.
- Mentoring is a joint venture. Successful mentoring means sharing responsibility for learning. Regardless of the facilities, the subject matter, the timing, and all other variables. Successful mentoring begins with setting a contract for learning around which the mentor, the mentee, and their respective line supervisors are aligned.



The Mentoring Relationship

An important element of the mentoring relationship is setting and facilitating clearly defined learning objectives. The process may begin with a first meeting where both parties can discuss their expectations. More detailed objectives can be defined and adopted as the relationship evolves. At the first meeting start-up issues, expectations, and initial goals should be addressed.

On-Going Communication

Regular communication is important in order to effectively maintain the mentor-mentee relationship. The closer the communication, the more likely the program will be successful.

Evolution of the Relationship

After the first meeting between mentor and the mentee has occurred, the role of the mentor in regard to coaching, counseling, facilitating, and networking will begin to take shape. Both parties should come well prepared to all meetings so that the relationship can develop smoothly.

Phases of a Mentoring Relationship

The mentoring relationship typically has four distinct phases:

- Orientation – building the base. During the early stages, both the mentor and mentee are getting to know each other, and building trust. At this time, both the mentee and the mentor are developing expectations of each other. The interaction, which occurs at this stage, will lay the foundation for a strong and beneficial relationship.
- The middle period. The middle phase is typically the most rewarding time for both mentor and mentee. The mutual trust, which has developed between the two, can give the mentee the confidence to challenge the ideas of the mentor, just as the mentor will challenge the mentee's ideas.
- Dissolving the relationship. Typically, the relationship begins to draw apart after a year or two. It is important, at this stage that the mentor step back from the formal relationship to discuss together with the mentee how they wish to continue their relationship.
- Redefining the relationship. The mentor-mentee relationship enters a new phase, where both parties can regard one another as equals. They continue to have some form of interaction, although it is now on a more casual basis.

Mentoring – Potential Pitfalls

Mentoring relationships do not always succeed. Some of the most frequent problems with mentoring relationships include:

- 'Mismatch' between mentor and mentee. A mismatch between the mentor and the mentee can be a cause of failure in the relationship. One or both members of the relationship may feel uneasy with the other, or they may not be able to achieve the level of friendship necessary for rich communication. Under such circumstances it may

be necessary to assign the young mentee to a different mentor. If the problem is identified during the first six months of the relationship the change can usually be made in an amicable way with no hard feelings on either side.

- Unrealistic expectations. Problems in the relationship can also occur if the mentee expects or demands too much from the mentor. It is important, therefore, that expectations are clearly defined from the beginning. The mentee should not expect the relationship to meet every need, nor for it to continue indefinitely.
- Breaches of confidentiality. In order to develop the type of relationship in which the mentor can be effective, he or she must first be perceived as trustworthy and able to keep confidences.

Since both parties in a mentoring relationship typically realize and accept the fact that a high level of trust is essential in order for an effective relationship to develop, there is little evidence of breaches of confidentiality. However, codes of conduct regarding the confidential nature of the relationship should be clearly defined and understood by both parties at the beginning of every mentoring relationship.

Benefits for Mentee's

- A non-threatening learning opportunity;
- Improved self-confidence;
- Developing business expertise & technical knowledge;
- Challenge;
- Support and reassurance;
- Networking/partnership opportunities;
- Coaching; and
- Listening and reassurance.

Benefits for the Mentor

- Increased motivation;
- Challenge;
- New insights and perspectives;
- An opportunity for self-development
- Increased self-esteem & pleasure;
- The opportunity to positively influence the next generation;
- Increased peer recognition
- The opportunity to improve communication

Characteristics of a Good Mentor

All successful gymnastics coaches do not necessarily make effective mentors; certain individuals are more effective in the role of developing others. Whether or not an individual is suited to the role of mentor may depend on his or her own stage of development and

experience. For example, a fairly successful individual may have had a specific, or limited, background and may not have enough general experience to offer. Prior to entering into a mentoring relationship, the mentee should assume the responsibility of assessing the mentor's potential effectiveness.

The qualities, which are essential in an effective mentor, include:

- A desire to help. Individuals who are interested in and willing to help others.
- Have had positive experiences. Individuals who have had positive formal or informal experiences with a mentor tend to be good mentors themselves.
- Good reputation for developing others. Experienced people who have a good reputation for helping others develop their skills.
- Time and energy. People who have the time and mental energy to devote to the relationship.
- Up-to-date knowledge. Individuals who have maintained current, up-to-date technological knowledge and/or skills.
- Learning attitude. Individuals who are still willing and able to learn and who see the potential benefits of a mentoring relationship.
- Demonstrated effective managerial (mentoring) skills. Individuals who have demonstrated effective coaching, counseling, facilitating and networking skills.

Characteristics of a Good Mentee

- Committed to expanding their capabilities,
- Open and receptive to new ways of learning and trying new ideas,
- Able to accept feedback and act upon it,
- Willingness to apply learning back on the job,
- Focused on achieving desired business results,
- Able to communicate and work cooperatively with others,
- Knows when to ask for help,
- Have a sense of personal responsibility and commitment,
- Willing to meet on a regular basis.

Role of the Mentee's Manager / Supervisor

The manager's role in employee development is on going and not modified by an employee's participation in a mentoring program. Mentoring is a development tool at the disposal of the organization. Managers have the essential role of supporting the learning process by encouraging on the job exploration while also

monitoring continued responsibility for performance. Managers fulfill a stewardship role in terms of day-to-day direct authority and capacity building, while mentors provide a broader and longer view that creates a path to the future for the mentee. This is a triad relationship between Manager – Mentee – Mentor.

Line Manager Responsibilities

- Providing personal feedback to participants concerning values and expectations.
- Cultivating individual abilities both for the current job and for future opportunities.
- Supporting and designing learning assignments in partnership with the mentor and mentee.
- Endorsing experimentation in a way that applauds new approaches and permits the possibility (likelihood) of mistakes.
- Asking questions to encourage discussion of what is being learned and how.

Thoughts on the Mentoring Process

- Think of mentoring as a three party effort, rather than a one on one "arranged marriage."
- Think of a mentor as a learning leader who facilitates a learning process, rather than as a guru who passes down "the word" to a favored individual.
- Think of growth as the acquisition of attitudes and capabilities as well as the acquisition of skills and behaviors.
- View development as being enhanced by open dialogue and free form thinking, rather than limited by discussion guided by a set agenda.
- Think of development assignments, rather than future promotions, as a way of synthesizing thoughts about next steps in the organization.
- Cultivate career self-reliance in employees who use the mentoring process as one of a set of tools in achieves high performance.
- Mentors should not take away problems but must guide people toward solving their own problems.

I was fortunate to have had a number of mentors in my life and enjoyed benefiting from all of their experience, their influence and knowledge. It is my hope to continue the mentorship legacy by coaching and mentoring the people I have the privilege to help. What might your organization look like with a crew of mentors and protégés working together for your common goal?

Employment Rules and Policies Manual

As stated in the Policies and Procedures chapter, it is essential that every gym have an Employee Rules, Policies and Procedures Manual. New gym owners should strive to create a comprehensive handbook and distribute the document(s) to every employee. Your Employee Manual is the guidebook for all staff and is the easiest and most effective way to educate and train new staff on your internal procedures. Have new employees read the Manual and quiz them on some of the important sections. Refer to these internal rules and policies often during staff meetings. Update the Manual as needed. Many sample policies are included in the Appendix either under the Human Resources heading, the Operations section or under Risk Management.

Staff Training

It is imperative to provide your employees with all the direction, training, and the tools necessary for them to fulfill their obligations. Depending upon their experience and work history, a new teacher could begin as an aide for a senior instructor for three months up to a year or they may be allowed to instruct their own class after a short orientation of working with another instructor for as little as a day or two.

Even the most seasoned coach that is a new hire to your gym should undergo some form of training before taking the floor with your athletes. It is imperative that he or she understands your gym's culture and expectations, and that you are able to see clearly demonstrated his or her ability to coach the skills needed for the group.

Regularly scheduled staff meetings and in-service training should be conducted to help ensure that all staff uses proper technique and follows sound child development practices. In addition, conduct a number of various certification courses (usually during the break after summer camps and the fall sessions or between Christmas and New Year holidays are a good times for this):

USA Gymnastics University courses and workshops provide a multi-level, standardized education and certificate that is available throughout the country with emphasis on the proper development of gymnastics participants in a positive and safe environment. USA Gymnastics University is a collection of resources for gymnastics education. The University provides greater educational opportunities for coaches, instructors, teachers, judges, and administrators at all levels and in all disciplines of gymnastics. Included as a part of the University are educational courses and programs,

technical materials and publications, and a professional certificate.

American Red Cross CPR and First Aid. The employer could pay for all course fees and staff could be paid for their time in class. It is recommended that this certification be a mandatory course for all full-time staff. CPR certification is typically valid for one year and must be renewed annually; First Aid is a three-year certification.

A number of other professional certifications are available and should be offered – accreditations, early childhood education courses, etc. Staff should also be offered the opportunity to attend Conferences and Workshops as they are announced. It is recommended to encourage all staff to continue their professional education, upgrade their skills, and constantly improve!

Finally, make sure to conduct safety drills and discuss emergency procedures in your trainings upon hire and at least annually. How to deal with a fire, earthquake, missing child, an intruder in the building, an extrication from the pit, a 911 call etc. are all essential parts of any comprehensive training program.

Schedule

Consistency is of utmost importance in developing a strong trusting relationship in the teacher. Students, particularly Preschoolers, come to rely on the routine and comfort that a regular instructor provides. Although absences and substitutes are bound to occur and should be accepted, having a plan to deal with the change will help ease the transitions. If staff needs to miss a class, proper notification of the change should be posted for the parents and class participants.

Parking Policies

Employees should park in areas that leave the prime parking spaces available for the customers. While staff often feels entitled to the privilege of parking close to the front door, that benefit belongs to the customer.

Telephone and Technology Policies

Management and supervisory personnel should maintain the ability to monitor the telephone and voice mail systems to ensure compliance with the privacy in the workplace policy as well as for other legitimate business reasons, including the desire to ensure that calls are handled in a professional manner and to promote efficiency in the manner in which callers are treated. We are all familiar with the phone recording, "This call may be monitored for quality assurance purposes." No personal phone calls should be allowed while on duty and any violation of this policy could result in progressive discipline and possible termination of

employment. The use of cell phones while on duty must be limited to emergency use ONLY. Cell phones should be turned off while on duty. Personal calls must be limited to during off-duty time.

Lockers

If the organization provides lockers for personnel to keep personal belongings, all personal property may be locked but the organization should reserve the right to inspect and/or examine the contents at any time. In compliance with privacy in the workplace policy, encourage staff to leave valuables at home as the organization should not be responsible for lost or stolen items.

Staff responsibilities

The primary goal of any program should be to provide a safe, secure and enjoyable environment for the children enrolled in it. All staff must be responsible for understanding and following the mission, the policies and procedures. Failure to follow any of these policies may result in disciplinary action or the termination of employment.

The most common, yet difficult complaint that most gym owners / directors receive is "lack of enthusiasm by the teachers." A smile goes a long way toward keeping students and parents satisfied. All teachers are required to assist in every class or be actively involved while in the gym. There can be ABSOLUTELY NO SITTING AROUND and visiting during class times. If you have time to lean, you have time to clean. Staff needs to set a positive "work ethic" example. Keep busy with controlled high energy!

It is essential that staff follows the rotation schedules as closely as possible. Following rotations sets an example of discipline and structure and allows teachers to plan class activities accordingly. Following an established schedule and lesson plan demonstrates preparedness and professionalism.

All equipment that is used during a rotation must be cleaned up before that class moves. Do not leave stations out for the next group to clean up. This is also a good time to ask that everyone pitch in to keep the entire area clean and organized; if you see paper on the floor, grips lying about, etc. please clean it up. The appearance of the gym is crucial to the perception a parent has of the organization and helps set the culture for students.

Staff is always responsible for their class. If staff has any problem (with a student, a parent, with equipment, or with a co-worker, etc.), let the supervisor/director/manager know immediately! Staff must all work

together to ensure an enjoyable experience for everyone — students, parents, and employees.

Staff is to report at the assigned time to work. The time that staff is on duty is to be used for work related responsibilities – no personal business should be conducted during work time. If staff is not assigned a duty and has time on their hands they are to report to their supervisor for further instructions and assignments. If for any reason a staff member will be arriving late, they are to call as soon as possible. Excessive tardiness may result in ill will with the rest of the employees. If a staff member is ill, they are also to call as soon as possible. Abuse of the sick leave policy may also negatively impact the culture of the gym.

It is essential to the program that all staff members on duty avoid conflict amongst co-workers. Time off must be requested in writing, one week before and will only be granted if a substitute can be found or other arrangements made.

All mobile program drivers are to fill out a driver's daily report and return it to their supervisor. If fuel indicator is at half, drivers are to fill the vehicle, either at the beginning of their schedule or after. All garbage or belongings of the children is to be cleared from the vehicles at the end of each activity. If vehicles are found littered with garbage at the beginning of your shift, it should be reported to the supervisor. All van windows must be closed, the doors locked and the vehicle parked in the designated spot after the last activity. If there is a maintenance problem with any of the vehicles, a report should be filled out and the supervisor should be notified as soon as possible.

Staff shall not encourage or engage in play fighting, kicking, wrestling (horseplay) with children or other staff or allow children to do this with each other.

It is part of staff's job to interact and nurture the children. It is expected of each teacher to be up and interrelating with the children. Sitting down, falling asleep, talking on the telephone or reading while in the class is unacceptable. Clumping together with other teachers to talk is not what is expected of staff, and may result in progressive discipline or termination.

Never yell or shout at a child, especially in anger. Staff may raise their voice to be heard, if there is a lot of confusion going on, but not in anger or to discipline a child. If a teacher begins getting upset, ask another teacher to take over the discipline problem or bring the child to the office. Never tell a child or a group to shut up! Never tease them, call them names or make fun of them.

Make contact with the parents in the group, know their names, introduce yourself or just say hello or good night. Not all parents will stop and chat and are often in hurry, but it is important that staff acknowledges them and initiates some kind of contact with them (a simple nod with direct eye contact and a simple smile works).

Staff enthusiasm is essential to the success of any program. Staff shall not sit while supervising the children except while helping with a direct skill, as a part of teaching the children, etc. Staff may not sit while on duty. There may be times when staff has low energy levels, but it is important to overcome this. Staff is there for the children and with anything less; staff will not be doing their job. Engage with the children and attentively supervise them. Be a part of their quality gymnastics experience!

It is unprofessional to eat in front of the children. Only water should be brought into the gym; and under no circumstances should hot beverages, like coffee, be consumed while on the floor. Leaving the work site to get food or drink while on duty is not permitted. Children are not permitted to use the vending machine or snack bar except after class or during regular breaks for athletes with longer workouts (e.g. during camp).

Staff is expected to follow any directions given by a supervisor at the time the directions are given. If there are questions or concerns about these directions, they should be discussed with the supervisor at a later time—away from the children and parents.

Never threaten a child, or use positive behavior, which is behavior we want to encourage children to do (i.e. picking up trash, rope climbs, sit-ups etc.), as a discipline tool. Natural consequences for negative behavior are the only accepted practice. For instance, missing a turn, exclusion from participating in an enjoyable activity, being sat out for a short period (a time out), being sent to the supervisor, or being sent home are probably the only acts of discipline to be used.

Teachers will be assigned specific job responsibilities and will be held accountable if they are not completed.

Appearance

Beauty is only skin deep and it is true that you can't judge a book by its cover, but appearance and first impressions mean a lot. Therefore, clean uniforms are required to be worn by every employee!!! Staff will be required to purchase a new shirt or will have to forfeit his/her shift if they do not have a staff shirt on when they arrive at work. We recommend black shorts (no shorter than the tips of the fingers) or black pants but

uniform shirts are a must. Open toed shoes or sandals are not recommended. A professional appearance conveys the image we are trying to present. You will be treated as a professional if you look like a professional. Cleanliness is next to godliness but neatness counts – clean clothes, well manicured, and showered.

Professionalism is the Key

You will play a very important part in the lives of the children who take part in your groups. In order for our program to be a success, YOU must present a positive role for your students to emulate. We must help in the development of better “junior citizens” and offer them an enjoyable experience in which to grow. It is your job to make them want to take part and to find value in their participation.

We are all to work toward maximizing the potential each child has in our care. Our goal is to meet the individual needs of each student and understand that everyone progresses at a different pace mentally and physically. We must spend equal amounts of time with each child making certain that his/her individual needs are being met, irrespective of their natural ability or long-term potential for the sport. We want every student to feel special. We will listen to them and communicate with them in a positive manner. We will promote overall physical fitness and the importance of having a strong and healthy body. We will teach discipline and the importance of following directions.

The children should learn respect for each other and their teachers. Above all we will develop courage and self-esteem and help the children learn that social involvement is a great and enjoyable stepping stone to the rest of their life. Remember that motivation is almost impossible to pass on to someone else, the best we can do is inspire. Motivation is internal and may or may not develop as a child grows. Inspiration is an external force that we can use if we are positive, excited, and enthusiastic about learning. Praise goes a long way toward inspiring a young child. You can't overdo it. Make a big deal when a child learns a new skill, make a big deal when a student performs well, make a big deal when a child behaves with courtesy, and make a big deal when a child tries hard. Always continue to praise and speak positively to the rest of the class while your star student is receiving his/her “reward” so that the other students don't resent you or their classmate. Focus on the child's effort, not the result, and always reinforce that they have the power to learn and grow inside of them. This will foster a growth mindset, which is so important for children in building resilience.

Performance Management

You want results from your efforts. You should expect results from your instructors. As a business owner, you need to enlighten, motivate, and ultimately inspire your employees. There are many models and systems available to help you accomplish that goal. Inspired leadership focuses on results; establishing clear goals and expectations for what you are trying to accomplish and requires involving your employees at all levels. It all begins with a few best practices for results-based (also known as performance-based) management:

- Share your vision with your employees. You must run a completely transparent operation. With results-based management, employees need to have a sense of ownership. They know beyond the shadow of a doubt what your company stands for and where it's going. If they don't know the big picture, how can they make it their own? Besides, when employees have a clear picture of your mission and vision, the expectations you help them set will make sense to them. They'll be more likely to buy into and achieve the intended outcomes.
 - Work with your staff to set challenging, yet attainable goals. Just like you work with your gymnasts to help them develop their goals so you can create a plan to help them achieve those goals, work with your staff on their performance goals. That's right, work with them. Don't impose expectations on your employees. In order to get buy-in, you need to make certain that the workers have helped create their objectives. Sit down with employees and hammer out goals together. Make it a priority. Never assume that your staff automatically knows what they're supposed to be doing. Clear and concise objectives are as vital to your employees' performance as equipment is to your gymnasts.
 - Give them a real voice in the company's future. Don't just let employees set their own expectations. Let them have real input into the gym's future. No matter how often you tell your employees "this is your company, too," if they have no real say-so, it's just lip service. Collaborate with them. Solicit their ideas and contributions. More precisely, actually take their advice and run with it. If you don't trust your employees enough to help shape your company's future, why did you hire them in the first place?
 - Make sure their work is meaningful. Take advantage of the talent in your organization. No one likes busywork or routine, mind-numbing tasks. Give your employees challenging assignments and expectations that stimulate their minds and that have a real impact on your organization. If you sense that an employee is just going through the motions, take him to lunch and ask, "What would challenge you?" Ask him to come up with a new product or service or process for your company and then let him be in charge of the project. It's amazing how few leaders really do this—but it's a tremendously empowering and inspiring gesture.
- Tell your employees it's okay to take risks—in fact, it's expected. A big part of being successful involves Risk; without it there can be no significant gain. Just like innovation in gymnastics takes place by those athletes willing to take the risk to try new skills, you need to make the possibility of failure OK. This is the real reason you need to keep the "big picture" in front of employees at all times—it helps them take calculated risks aimed at advancing not only their own expectations but also your corporate vision. When people are free to take risks, they are likely to explore multiple possibilities and find unexpected solutions. They will own these solutions and hold themselves accountable. To inspire risk-taking in your employees, take risks yourself. In this way you model the creative spirit you want them to embrace.
 - Put systems in place for measuring productivity. The whole point of a results-oriented culture is to help employees become more productive. That's why you must be sure not to confuse activity with progress. There is a big difference between being busy and being productive. Put systems in place for measuring productivity and live by them. What gets measured gets done. Do everything you can to eliminate redundancies and make sure your people understand that being busy is not the same as being productive. Your gymnasts can spend a lot of time in the gym; their success depends on how productive that time is. The same rule applies for your staff.
 - Give both formal and "real time" feedback often. Establish ongoing (recommended quarterly) evaluation processes so people can get feedback on how well they're meeting their expectations. But don't limit feedback to formal assessments. You should tell people in "real time" what they're doing wrong so they can correct it, but it's even more important to tell them what they're doing right. Spontaneous coaching is one of the most critical elements of a positive-value culture. It is the pathway to productivity. This kind of feedback refines the processes by which employees meet their expectations today, and paves the way for them to meet ever-more-ambitious expectations in the future.

Anti-Harassment and Workplace Violence Prevention

Although very rare, interactions with an irate customer can escalate to a point of being uncomfortable and potentially unsafe. Occasionally, a disgruntled employee will become irritated and act out against a coworker in a moment of anger. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) defines workplace violence as violence or the threat of violence against workers, and is one of the leading causes of job-related deaths. Over 2 million American workers are victims of workplace violence each year, and no one is immune.

As discussed in the Policies and Procedures chapter, having a plan for a variety of potential situations can help keep your employees and customers safe. In the event of a shelter in place or lock-down situation, visitors and staff are to congregate in the interior of the facility and are to remain there until police determine that it is safe to leave. No one is to venture outside.

- If a riot occurs in the vicinity, all perimeter doors are to be locked.
- Contact the police (911) to report the disturbance; include any observations you've made.
- In the case of a civil disturbance such as an angry employee, customer, group of people, etc., remain calm.
- Listen to the person(s) carefully and speak to them in a calm straightforward manner.
- Under no circumstances speak to the individuals in a condescending or hostile tone of voice.
- Do not offer unsolicited information.
- If necessary, call 911 and have the police department handle the situation.

Even if the situation appears to resolve itself without involving the police, document the incident with as much pertinent information as possible. Make other employees aware of the situation as appropriate. The hostile person(s) may return.

Easy Ways to Reward Your Staff

One of the bigger challenges of being a manager or business owner is figuring out how to motivate and reward your employees. One of the key points

in effectively managing human resources is to catch people doing something right and telling them about it immediately. It takes some work to recognize and properly reward your staff. The payoff can be huge – in a highly motivated and loyal crew that enjoys their work enough to become long-term employees that represent you and your business well. You may also find that you have created a culture where people are eager to apply to work for you because of your reputation of treating employees well. I have a few suggestions on ways you can reward your staff – without breaking the bank.



On a daily basis you can try to greet every person by name and with a genuine smile. I want my employees to know that I value their place in our organization. Getting personally involved has limits but a simple; “I hope your dog is doing better after his surgery” or “I’m sorry your son was sick and missed school yesterday” shows compassion and interest and means a lot to a person. Take every opportunity to praise them in public. A little goes a long way. It takes a little planning and preparation but rewarding your employees does not have to be expensive. Being effective may require a concerted effort and a time commitment but the effort does pay off.

At a staff party I facilitated a few years ago; a little breakfast party that cost me less than \$100 (including pancakes) in which I was able to reward a staff of 15. I created awards for my workers that ranged from a pair of hand painted rubber gloves for the Preschool teacher who I recognized for having cleaned up the most “accidents” after the little ones to a roll of Scotch tape for the employee who had “stuck with it through a tough time.” It was a challenge to my creativity but I was able to come up with things like a trowel for my receptionist for being able to “smooth things over with the irate parents” and a box of nails for the employee who was “tough as nails” and never missed a day of work. Little trophies with pipe cleaner figures in blocks of foam were a huge hit. The important thing throughout was we all laughed and enjoyed ourselves.

A great reward for your staff is when you help make work fun. Just like we want our kids to enjoy gymnastics, we want our teachers to enjoy their jobs. Have little birthday celebrations – complete with a goofy hat and a cupcake with a candle. Give them a hand-written thank you card. Let them choose the

music (so long as it is child friendly) at the gym. Ring a bell and make public announcements lauding their accomplishments. Every employee is unique and different things work for different people. You will have to decide what motivates your staff. The key is to be sincere, do the best you can without worrying about not doing it well enough.

One thing to remember is to avoid the word “but” when rewarding a job well done. It takes away everything you may be trying to accomplish by saying, “You did a great job on that project, but I would have...” or “Nice work, but did you ever try...” This is also a good teaching principle; avoid the big “but” when coaching.

If you still haven’t decided how to reward your employees, I have included a list of suggestions below. There are also a number of great business management books available, from *The One Minute Manager* by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, to Bob Nelson’s *1001 Ways to Reward Employees* just to name a couple. If you have a program that has worked for you, I invite you to contact me so I can add to this list:

- Say thanks
- Smile
- Discounts on merchandise
- Promote from within
- Give credit
- Birthday cards
- Bring treats
- Employee of the Month award
- Movie passes
- Special parking space
- Buy a soda
- Lunch with the boss
- Staff uniforms
- Newsletter recognition
- Send to conferences
- Day off
- Free massage
- Casual dress day
- Book or magazine
- CD or tape or iTunes card
- Nominate them for an award
- Standing ovation for a job well done
- Wash their car
- Have a contest
- Ask for their advice
- Gift certificates
- Name an award in their honor
- Photo on the wall of fame
- Thank you card
- Boss for a day
- Make a button

- Pat on the back
- Handshake
- Bottle of water
- Special coupon
- Listen
- E-mail a thank you

Professional Memberships and Networking

“A young boy was walking with his father along a country road. When they came across a very large tree branch the boy asked, “Do you think I could move that branch?” His father answered, “If you use all your strength, I’m sure you can.” So the boy tried mightily to lift, pull and push the branch but he couldn’t move it. Discouraged he said, “Dad, you were wrong. I can’t do it.” His dad said, “Try again.” This time, as the boy struggled with the branch his father joined him and together they pushed the branch aside. “Son,” the father said, “the first time you didn’t use all your strength. You didn’t ask me to help.”

Like any other group of professionals, we’re always looking to build our professional networks, find career advice and uncover new industry resources. One way to further these goals is through becoming a member of a professional organization. The affiliation must not only provide a value to the individual, but also should enhance or maximize the performance of the person to ultimately benefit the organization.

Some associations have membership counts in the thousands, and it can be difficult to navigate such a vast crowd. The size of the group also affects how successful you can be in making meaningful contact at an event such as an industry Congress.

Getting the most out of any professional association membership is like anything else in life—you’re going to get out of it as much as you put into it. Fortunately, there are some easy steps that you can follow to ensure that each of your association memberships is a success. Really think about what you’re trying to get out of this membership. Why are you thinking about joining an association?

The following are a few questions to consider:

- What are you hoping to accomplish?
- Is this about furthering your career? Is this about growing your business?
- Is it a social objective, or is it truly a professional objective?

Establishing clear objectives by answering these questions before you start assessing potential

organizations will greatly benefit you in the long run. Ask yourself specific questions about why you are spending the time and identify objectives for your participation. We're fairly certain these two women will achieve what they're seeking because they have defined what they're looking for. Each time they attend a program meeting, they have their objectives in the back of their minds— and are looking for ways to meet them.

You won't meet people by walking into a room of 500 to 1,000 association members and handing out business cards. You're not going to get specific career advice or develop potential business leads that way. Even though you might exchange business cards in that venue, it will be months before any kind of meaningful relationship is developed. The smaller committees and task forces that you will work on, the events you will help plan, the programs you will help coordinate by volunteering your time—that's where you're really going to develop working relationships with other members.

By building substantial relationships, you will also learn more about the resources within the organization, as well as additional professional organizations that your new contacts are involved in that may be relevant to achieving your objectives.

Professional membership confers a special status on those who hold it. Memberships open a pathway to join the rapidly expanding world of the professional; members who are found around the country, as well as those in the international community of like-minded individuals and organizations. Membership presents opportunities for competition, professional recognition and access to educational forums.

The number of gymnastics business operations has more than tripled since 1972, and the industry continues to grow and change rapidly. Growth in our industry has thrust a major impact on our profession; an impact we will continue to feel. The number and variety of gymnastics related operations also continue to change. New jobs are appearing, as the industry grows more complex. Coaches are more sophisticated in their thinking and even more specialized in their presentation. More is the operative word no matter where you look throughout the industry: more large organizations, more chains, more managerial positions and titles, more variety, more development of new opportunities, more women and minorities. Being a part of a professional membership organization adds up to more opportunity for you and your career development or advancement.

Advantages of USA Gymnastics Professional Memberships:

- Large and prestigious organizational connections
- Access to the leadership in the industry
- Professional networking at local, regional, national, and international levels
- National publications
- Opportunity to attend Regional Conferences and National Congresses
- National, regional, and local seminars, workshops, and symposiums
- Professional Certification opportunities
- Web Sites - resources about the industry on the Internet
- Published and Internet Job Listings; service for members to post their resumes, review resumes for new employees, or look for a new job; jobs are typically posted for free as a service to members
- Vendor Resource Guides
- Opportunity to participate in sanctioned events
- Local, national, and international competitions
- National and Local Awards and Honors
- Programmatic Accreditation for colleges and universities
- Member Services Center; sometimes via a toll free number
- Educational Grants for members
- Health and Life Insurance Programs
- Video Library
- Discounted merchandise rates
- Apprenticeship and Intern Programs

There are a number of professional membership opportunities in the gymnastics industry. According to a research report by the John Hancock Insurance Company, while two out of three gym club owners report that they expect their business to expand, one of the greatest business concerns of gym owners is finding and retaining qualified employees. Meetings and events can be your springboard to new professional horizons. Your membership fees help support organization programs, events and operating costs, and play a big part in helping the membership grow.

There are lots of advantages to becoming a professional member. The true impact of a professional membership comes from your participation with the organization. Get involved. Once you've made the commitment to join the organization, make a personal commitment to helping that organization grow. By moving forward and personally helping the organization achieve its mission, you will immediately start to see the fruits of your labor.

When we say, "Get involved," we mean do more than simply attend meetings. Sign up to become more active in

one of the organization's volunteer committees. Help plan an upcoming event. This is the way you will meet people and get traction on achieving those initial objectives.

Don't just join a professional organization so you can "claim" membership, placing a certificate on the wall or listing your membership in promotional material; involve yourself in the organization and take advantage of the networking opportunities. The more you engage yourself in the organization, the more you will receive from your participation. Be an ACTIVE member!

Conducting Effective Staff Meetings

Most people say the meetings they attend are a waste of time and energy. Are you looking for a way to improve your meetings? Establish a set of ground rules that everyone agrees to live by. It will give the leader—and participants—a way to rope in disruptive behavior and set expectations that will create a healthy meeting environment. All meetings must have a set written, pre-published agenda with a beginning time and end purpose in mind.

- Team members will arrive in the meeting room at or before the published start time and will return from breaks at or before the appointed time
- A meeting leader and recorder will be appointed or selected
- A designated timekeeper will manage the meeting's time constraints
- Team members are collectively and individually responsible for ensuring the team follows meeting protocols. Anyone may ask for a process check.
- A list of action items, owners and timeframes will be kept
- Issues that are not relevant to the current agenda will be "parked" for future discussion and action
- The team will avoid or control interruptions to the meeting such as:
 - Non-meeting (or other) work
 - Audible cell phones
 - Unnecessary absence from the meeting side conversations
 - Inappropriate distractions
- Everyone should contribute fully, but only one person at a time speaks
- Meetings will be evaluated at closing, using the



start, stop, continue process

- Team members will make a strong effort to stay for the entire meeting
- Meetings will end on time

What is said here; stays here.

If you are afraid that confidential information will be leaked inappropriately, you will hold back your opinions and guard your words. A management team must trust each other to keep confidences, or it will never be able to create a comfortable climate to have a candid discussion. If someone leaves a meeting and says to an outsider, "Charlie didn't want to support this new policy and he really got angry with Janet when she said..." he or she has broken the seal of trust. Comments like this can undermine decisions and create a paranoid and negative political climate.

Disagree in private; be united in public.

A management team that is unwilling or unable to debate and disagree is doomed to be fundamentally weak and ineffective. Lively debates usually produce the best, workable solutions to complex problems but once that solution is reached, a united front is required to sustain it and enforce it.

We know what happens when children try to get their way by working on the lenient parent. The same thing often happens when employees know someone who doesn't support a policy or decision. Just as parents need to be united on decisions at home, managers need to show united support to one another. If a manager walks out of a meeting and says to an employee, "Well, I certainly don't support that decision..." or "Only half of the management team supported that decision because it favors their departments," the entire management team's credibility is weakened.

Silence is agreement.

We've all been in meetings after the meeting. You know what I'm talking about—those closed-door conversations where everyone's true feelings become known. Healthy decision-making requires that all opinions be put on the table. If someone silently disagrees, it isn't fair to the rest of the team. Then, if the person walks out the door and badmouths the decision, the person undermines the integrity of the process. (They also look like a sneaky weasel with no backbone.)

Attack problems, not people.

This is an old ground rule, but it's still a good ground rule. People need to feel safe enough to voice their honest opinions. If someone in the group jumps down your throat or attacks with a sarcastic remark, you are likely to either retaliate or shut down completely. In either case, open dialogue is dead.

In Depth

Personnel costs are typically the largest expense for a gymnastics business. Your employees are a valuable asset and must be managed accordingly. Successful gyms treat their labor force as professionals, and expect them to perform like professionals. Provide staff with training, challenges, and opportunities. Making them partners in your success will result in dedicated and loyal employees.

Listen without interrupting.

This may sound simple, but in the heat of a discussion people tend to spend their energy defending their own position instead of listening to the thoughts of others. During meetings, soft-spoken members' ideas are sometimes ignored, aggressive members tromp over the words of others and eager participants are so busy generating ideas, their enthusiasm causes them to jump in before others are finished speaking. A leader's job is to keep the participation balanced and safe for all.

Proactively manage the agenda.

Meetings without a clear agenda are destined to spin wheels and frustrate the participants. Wise leaders know that a well-managed process is as important as the group dynamics. A short time frame should cause the agenda to be shortened to the vital few topics.

A controversial topic may be the only item on the agenda. A topic requiring a decision should require the attendance of all stakeholders. For a meeting to be successful, the process must be designed to fit the results you want to achieve.

Employee Performance Evaluations

A big part of every gym owner's job is to provide coaching and feedback to employees. Annual performance reviews are a common practice in most businesses. Giving performance feedback is vital to the success of your teachers and coaches and therefore your organization. If your staff isn't approachable and

coachable, you have a huge problem on your hands. Let's look at a couple of techniques that may make giving constructive criticism a little easier...

If you're like most people, you probably get a little defensive when you feel criticized. Even mild feedback, gently delivered, can make most people feel as if they have to explain themselves. The fact is, people don't make mistakes on purpose and we all have good intentions, so when faced with negative feedback, we feel compelled to explain our intentions, rather than listen to what the other person is trying to say. The conversation grinds to a halt and the person who is trying to give feedback is shut down and probably frustrated and annoyed.

If an employee has a history of being defensive or angry when given corrective feedback, that person's manager (you) may avoid the nasty prospect of telling the person when they are off track. "Who needs the aggravation? She won't listen anyway," could be the reason. Co-workers certainly won't risk approaching the person, since they have even less authority. This often creates even more problems within the ranks.

An effective gym owner strives to give more positive than negative feedback; reinforcing positive behaviors rather than correcting negative ones. It is easy to see problems and point them out, while identifying and encouraging good work sometimes take more effort. An employee that shows up for work on time and ready for work everyday and always follows procedures deserves to be recognized for that work ethic but often gets overlooked. The staff member that shows up late and unprepared usually gets the attention.

When behavior or performance falls short of expectation, use constructive feedback to bring the problem to that person's attention and discuss the impact of that behavior. Be direct. State the facts as you observe them, describing the behavior using specific details; "I noticed that you were late on Monday and Thursday this week. When you are late, the rest of the teachers are forced to set up your stations and cover your classes. This is very stressful and not acceptable to the rest of us."

Give the feedback as soon as the behavior occurs but try not to give feedback when you are angry or upset. Give positive and negative feedback at different times to avoid mixed messages. Don't allow little annoyances build up to a negative pattern of behavior. When you give corrective feedback, be prepared to receive feedback from the other person so give them time to respond.

When receiving feedback, do not become defensive.

Listen without interrupting or becoming argumentative. Use active listening skills and paraphrase the feedback to make sure you understand and the other person knows you are hearing what they say. Ask for specific examples and details. Be open and willing to work out a solution.

When the feedback session is over, conclude the discussion by agreeing on next steps. Just as important, a good owner / manager will follow-through and check in again to make sure the feedback resulted in positive behaviors.

Checklist for Constructive Feedback

- Focus on the BEHAVIOR rather than the person
- Focus on ACTUAL EXPERIENCES rather than judgment
- Focus on SHARING INFORMATION rather than giving advice
- Focus on TIME AND PLACE specifics
- Focus on the AMOUNT OF INFORMATION the employee can receive
- Focus on ALTERNATIVES rather than single answers
- Focus the feedback on the VALUE TO THE RECEIVER rather than on the relief it provides for the sender
- Set up a TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION process
- GET COMMITMENT to a resolution

T.E.L.L. model of giving feedback

- TELL them, specifically, about the exact behavior you want repeated or is problematic (and therefore, to be corrected). Be objective and beware of taking a position about your observations.
- EXPLAIN what results or implications are created by their actions either negative or positive. Do not blame or attack (use "I" statements)
- LISTEN to their ideas for correcting the problem. Solicit their "buy-in" and be prepared to negotiate to an agreeable solution.
- LET them know what positive or negative consequences will occur if the problem is corrected or not. Indicate payoffs, penalties, rewards, or punishments for accepting or rejecting the solutions for change. Avoid threatening or making commitments you cannot fulfill.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Gymnastics Professionals

In 1989, Stephen R. Covey wrote a best-selling book entitled *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. In it,

Covey explained habits that assist people in becoming more effective and successful in their professional and personal lives. This book continues to be one of the most widely read books on the market. Although the book is targeted to the successful business executive, the strategies presented by Covey are entirely relevant and applicable to the Gymnastics Professional. The seven habits apply not only to working with students in classes; they are relevant in many aspects of one's career.

Covey (1989) defined a habit "as the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire" (p. 47). This means that habits are a matter of knowing what needs to be done, knowing how to do it, and wanting to get it done. Habits are important because they determine one's behaviors and shape one's character. Like physical skills, habits are developed and learned. Thus, to create a good habit, one must address all three dimensions: the knowledge, the skill, and the desire. The seven habits that Covey identified are based on effectiveness. Taking those habits and translating them to the Gymnastics workplace, more specifically to teaching the sport, is not a stretch. In fact, it makes a lot of sense. The habits can be applied to working with students or colleagues. Adapted from a similar article by LeeAnn Martin, this piece will focus on how the seven habits can help Gymnastics Professionals work more successfully with administrators and other teachers.

1. BE PROACTIVE.

Being proactive is considered the most basic habit of the effective person. This goes beyond just taking initiative; it requires taking responsibility for behaviors. Highly effective people do not blame their behaviors on their circumstances or situation. They understand that their behaviors are products of their own choices. Their physical, social, and psychological environments or stimuli, on the other hand, affect reactive people. They react to and blame their behaviors on their surroundings, the people with whom they work, and how they are treated. For example, a reactive coach will blame his or her inadequate teaching on the lack of equipment or something unexpected (such as the sudden loss of a facility). The reactive teacher will blame ineffective teaching on how he or she was treated by a coworker. A reactive response allows the person to avoid responsibility.

Proactive coaches not only take responsibility for their teaching regardless of their physical, social or psychological environment; they are "value driven." Their behaviors are determined by what they hold important. Highly effective Gymnastics Instructors teach well, regardless of their environment, because they

are committed to their values and principles. Proactive people do not allow others' behaviors or situations to influence them, because they are able to focus on what is best for their students.

Suppose there is a gym owner who does not appreciate Preschool or Recreation classes, and his or her behaviors indicate little support for the program. As a result, the instructor learns that he (each example throughout will alternate "he" and "she") will lose his event rotation multiple times because there are other, "more important" uses for the equipment. In situations like these, the Preschool teacher can choose one of several responses. He can accept it, buy into it, and behave as though he believes that it is acceptable to diminish the importance of his classes. Secondly, he can use it as an excuse to teach poorly and put minimal effort into teaching and planning because "it won't do any good." As a third response, he could become argumentative and demanding, probably triggering deterioration in the relationship he has with his boss. Or the teacher can choose a fourth response. He could see it as an opportunity to educate his owner, the parents of his students, and the other teachers about the importance and uniqueness of Preschool classes. The proactive person chooses the last response, a response that does not empower someone else's weakness to control them. Proactive coaches are driven by the values and principles that, hopefully, caused them to become teachers in the first place.

Another aspect of being proactive is to make the choice to spend energy in productive ways. Covey suggested that all those things that concern an individual fall within a "circle of concern." However, not everything that concerns teachers is within their control to change. Those things that teachers can indeed alter fall within the "circle of influence." Why should teachers waste time and energy on things over which they have no control? Reactive people spend a significant amount of energy within the circle of concern: they complain and blame their situations on the environment or on the behaviors of others. Proactive people spend their energies on things they actually can change or influence.

Does the circle of influence increase in size? Of course! In teaching, there are always things the teacher cannot control, such as the students who are absent from class (which can wreak havoc on scheduled work outs), or other teachers not showing up as scheduled (forcing other coaches to adjust their plans). No amount of complaining or concern can change such things, and these attitudes give opportunities for others to view the coach as a negative, worrisome person. Why not spend

energy focusing on alternative activities for a make-up day, a different day for combined age-group activities, or an abbreviated lesson for the shortened class time? These ideas would be far more productive and effective for the students, and others will view the teacher as more upbeat and positive. The coach has not changed the students or other staff, but she has controlled the situation in a more effective way. When the owner or co-workers are uneducated about Preschool classes and fail to support it, reactive people complain about co-workers and blame their own ineffective teaching on lack of support. Proactive people look for ways to educate colleagues, creating avenues of communication (memos, newsletters, invitations to attend / observe classes, etc.). As a result, colleagues better understand what is happening in the gym. Colleagues may even begin to educate the parents, other teachers, and the Booster Club about what Preschool gymnastics encompasses and needs.

Being proactive depends largely on how much individuals are willing to work on themselves and their responses. In other words, they take responsibility for their actions. This behavior will, in turn, begin to influence others.

2. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND.

To begin with the end in mind, one must visualize the end of one's life as a frame of reference. Individuals should ask, "What kind of person, or teacher, or friend, or partner do I want to be remembered as?" This becomes the criterion by which effective people govern their behaviors on a daily basis. "Does the behavior I exhibited today contribute to the image of how I want to be remembered?" By identifying what is important, one has a map or a compass for everyday behaviors.

Gymnastics coaches, then, should imagine how they want to be remembered as a teacher or colleague. Thus, their teaching, interactions, and conduct should support that image. This concept of identifying an end product and "going backwards" is not uncommon. It is not unlike examining the goals and objectives identified within the curriculum. All lessons and activities should support, in some way, meeting those objectives. As coaches develop their lessons, their objectives, and their curricular activities, they need to judge whether they will contribute to creating the gymnast they envision.

It should be relatively easy to identify the type of teacher one wants to be remembered as, and then make the choice that daily behaviors will support this picture. Many organizations create mission or vision statements

that are generally examples of the “end product.” Covey suggested writing a personal mission statement. It is important for individuals to identify what is “deeply important” to themselves. That becomes the definition of success or the definition of oneself as the highly effective coach. “What is my vision of myself as a teacher? As a person?” This should become one’s personal creed and standard for behaviors. Ineffective instructors cannot articulate the type of teacher they want to be or the type of gymnast they are trying to create. They work isolated from personal standards. A personal mission statement allows someone to be proactive, because the person has determined his or her direction and values. Lives should center on principles, because principles can bring alignment and perspective to other aspects of one’s life.

3. PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST.

Habit three is the physical creation, fulfillment, and actualization of what has been created through habits (one’s personal, principle-centered mission). Logically then, the first two habits are prerequisites to the third. Habit three focuses on effective self-management. Individuals must use self-discipline and independent will to behave according to their principles. This is what compels people to do things that they would rather not do, but know need to be done. Self-discipline and independent free will also prevent people from operating on impulse. In other words, one must follow principles and put first things first.

Habit three involves identifying and prioritizing short-term and long-term goals. Personal goals should reflect one’s mission, and they drive behaviors. Yet, teachers often face situations that may not fall neatly into their personal goals.

Covey explained that situations could be categorized as urgent or not urgent, and as important or not important. Urgent issues need immediate attention. This could be a message from a parent saying, “Call me ASAP!” Important activities generally contribute to one’s mission and values. For example, this could include how a teacher wants to be viewed as a colleague. Thus, responding to the parent’s message is viewed as urgent, and wanting to maintain a strong working relationship with the parent would be important.

Activities that are both urgent and important (sometimes considered crises) can be all consuming. If the majority of one’s energy is used to address crisis situations, stress and burnout can result. If most time is spent in crisis management, people have little time and energy to focus on things that are important, but perhaps not

urgent. Things that are deemed important often revolve around building relationships. But because the results of one’s attention to these matters may not be immediately visible, and the need to cultivate relationships with colleagues is generally not urgent, people tend to neglect them or put them on the back burner.

For teachers, urgent issues arise on a daily basis. A child gets hurt in class or the teacher comes to the gym to find an angry message from a parent. Covey did not suggest ignoring urgent issues; rather, highly effective coaches also purposely spend their time on activities that are important, especially those that are not urgent and important. This is often difficult. Although being a physically active individual or a good role model for a physically active lifestyle is important, it is very easy to neglect exercise because of matters that are perceived as urgent. In other words, people sacrifice their workout because physical activity is not urgent. However, highly effective people make the time to exercise, because it is important. Highly effective people prioritize these activities and put much effort into them. In other words, they put first things first.

Over time, by spending more energy on those things that are not urgent but are important, the number of urgent activities can be decreased. For example, if having collegial relationships is important, and energy is spent building these relationships, there may be fewer colleague-related crises to which one must respond. Perhaps a coach has been struggling with a particular recreational class teacher in the gym. The class teacher just doesn’t seem to see eye-to-eye on many issues, and the teacher is highly critical of the coach. If the coach nurtures the relationship, the class teacher criticizes him less; there is greater understanding of what he does, and their interactions become pleasant, because the coach was proactive in developing a positive working relationship. As a result, the coach will find he has to devote less time to responding to misunderstandings or accusations.

Besides minimizing crises, one can also create more time to tend to important issues by getting better at saying no. By prioritizing and beginning with the end in mind, individuals are better able to say no to things that are not important to them. The ability to say no helps people to say yes to things that support their personal mission. Highly effective people can do this because their habits “become deeply planted in their hearts and minds” (Covey, 1989, p. 158).

Of course, being organized helps to generate more time to work on important things. Covey suggested that people organize their schedules by the week rather

than by the day. Covey suggested examining the varied roles one must fulfill in life (such as partner, teacher, parent, etc.) and then scheduling the week around the things that need to be done in terms of those roles and the goals associated with them.

Putting first things first involves making choices continuously, and it can be done only if there is a clear articulation of one's goals.

4. THINK WIN / WIN.

Win/win is a philosophy that one uses to have mutually positive interactions with others. In other words, when there are problems that must be solved in the workplace the "agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying" (Covey, 1989, p. 207). When everyone feels positively about the resulting decision, they will work harder to support it. It creates a cooperative, rather than competitive, environment in which there are no losers; thus, no one succeeds based on someone else's failure. Win/win is distinctly different from an environment where someone wins and someone loses (win/lose or lose/win) or where everyone loses (lose/lose). A lose/lose situation is severely counterproductive. Here, individuals compete against each other to extremes so that no one can win. Feelings of anger and even revenge can result as the other person is seen as the "enemy." In fact, people in this situation often lose sight of what they are fighting for, because the energy is focused on the battle.

In a gymnastics work environment, win/win means that one does not work to compete against other teachers or programs in the gym. For example, in one gym there might be limited use of a certain space that is desired by two coaches. The owner could employ a sign-up sheet to schedule use of the space, producing a competitive environment where teachers would literally race to the sheet. This would create a win/lose environment. The competition for space could become so argumentative and negative that a lose/lose situation would result if the owner said, "Fine! I'll do the assignment of space, regardless of when you want or need the space!" Alternatively, the owner could allot a specific amount of time or days to each teacher who desired it based on need. Better yet, teachers could work together to determine who might have the highest need on certain days, and decisions would be mutually beneficial - even to the point of the teachers modifying their schedules to accommodate one another. Clearly, the latter is a win/win situation.

Which is best? It depends on the situation. How people answer that question is based largely on the

relationships they want to cultivate. If a teacher is relatively unconcerned about the issue, but wants to create or maintain a positive relationship with a co-worker, conceding to the co-worker (a lose/win situation) might be appropriate. However, if individuals strive to always have a win/lose situation in the school setting, the relationship with the other person will suffer. On the other hand, in a scenario where a colleague is clearly in the wrong or wanting to do something inappropriate, a win/lose situation is what one might want to create. The win/win scenario seems to be the one that fits most situations, and does not harm relationships with peers, co-workers, or even students.

Developing win/win situations is based to a great extent on the first three habits. Without being proactive about living one's principles, it is not possible to consider others' feelings while staying focused on core values. Individuals must have the strength and commitment to do what they value as a teacher, without offending or "defeating" a coworker that they must face every day. This consideration for others allows effective coaches to celebrate victories of colleagues, instead of resenting them. It allows people to help others succeed. These behaviors will nurture any relationship. If all parties involved can set aside personal ego and are committed to win/win, one can imagine the possibilities of work that can get done and the behaviors that are modeled and taught to students. And, with all the positive energy that will exist, there will be little room for negative energy and thinking.

5. SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD.

This habit deals with empathy and the ability to diagnose before prescribing an answer. Most people are usually more concerned about being understood, without understanding the other person first. Empathic listening is listening with the intent to understand. Part of how one understands how someone feels is to hear the other person's words, and watch his or her body language or behaviors.

As Covey observed, people learn how to do three of the four forms of communication: reading, writing, and speaking. But the fourth form, listening, is rarely taught. Yet, listening is critical to good communication. Truly listening to and understanding someone is a relationship-nurturing activity. The more people show they are genuinely listening and understanding, the more the other person is willing to communicate with them.

For example, being misunderstood by class teachers is one of the struggles many Team coaches face. The coach may know he is doing the right thing in the gym, yet may be criticized by a particular class teacher because that teacher does not value the teaching of certain skills. In fact, the class teacher wants her students to come to gymnastics and just “have fun.” The coach invites her to accompany her class in the gym, to take part, and to get a more realistic view of what the coach does and is looking for. She fails to do so, and the coach becomes increasingly frustrated because of her criticism. Finally, they decide to meet after practice one day. The confrontation the coach may have been dreading evolves into an open discussion and “tutoring session” of sorts. However, it is not a matter of the coach explaining to the class teacher what actually occurs in the team setting. It turns out that the coach, too, was uneducated about the class teacher’s situation and what she did on a daily basis. Both agree that they will each visit each other’s teaching environment. The class teacher attends team workouts with her class for several sessions, and the coach goes to her rotation during several class periods. In observing her class, the coach begins to understand the challenges she faces: her class is squeezed into a small area of the gym, causing multiple interruptions during the day; her class includes many challenging children whose disruptive behaviors are minimized in a movement setting; and she has more students than most teachers in the gym. Together, they develop a plan to relieve some of the stressors they both face. The coach agrees to incorporate play-based activities and to visit her class with more frequency to assist her. She goes to team workouts with her class to get some ideas on new condition drills and learn spotting skills (which may encourage her to more fully engage her students). They develop a positive relationship. The coach is no longer angry and bitter with her, and she no longer criticizes the program. Both win and this could not have happened if the coach was not clear on his own principles, yet willing to compromise. Yet it was not until the coach truly understood the class teacher’s situation that he realized why she was so critical of him.

Being understood is also part of this habit, but people are much more willing to understand a person if they feel the person understood them. Most people have worked with colleagues who are quiet when they are spoken to, not because they are listening, but because they are preparing what they are getting ready to say. In this situation the person speaking rarely feels understood. Yet, if efforts are made to understand others, they are more likely to do the same. Empathic listening allows one to be understood better, thus increasing one’s circle

of influence (described earlier). Perhaps the reason a gym owner and some parents do not support a coach is that they lack understanding of what the coach is teaching, and they are reverting to their own perceptions of gymnastics training. When people listen empathically and seek to understand another’s perspective, they can better address the issues.

Seeking first to understand is within one’s own power; thus it is, like all behaviors, a choice. By seeking to understand, a person can truly understand where others are coming from, allowing one to make better, more informed, decisions.

6. SYNERGIZE.

Covey (1989) stated, “Synergy is the essence of principle-centered leadership” (p. 262). Synergy is combining, joining, and blending all parts to create a more powerful, more creative whole. In essence it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It is about creating momentum as a group to accomplish more than each person could do independently. This resembles participation on a team, where the energy and momentum created by the team exceeds by far what could be generated by each of the individual members of the team.

In teaching, many situations require group participation, such as committee work or departmental tasks. I had the experience of working with a diverse group of gymnastics professionals in writing curriculum. The first meetings were all about getting to know one another, understanding the complex situations in which each teacher worked, and gaining insight into the various teaching personalities and philosophies in the room. It did not take long, however, for the group to gain momentum and create a document of which we were extremely proud, knowing that if each of us had worked individually, we would not have generated a document as strong. The process can initially feel chaotic and confusing. But suddenly the group finds direction, and excitement emerges. It is as if the entire group becomes focused. Synergy requires trust, openness, and receptivity. It also requires empathic and respectful communication. And it results in a win/win environment.

Most people have had group experiences with the opposite result. Perhaps the group never generated momentum, or perhaps momentum was lost because the necessary level of communication failed to occur. As a result, enthusiasm, interest, and membership was diminished or eliminated.

Suppose a coach must share the new gymnastics equipment in the gym. She and the other teachers

want to schedule the equipment at the same time. Both could argue and disagree to the point where the owner refuses to let either of them have the equipment when they want it (lose/lose). They could draw straws, where one person wins and the other loses (win/lose or lose/win). They could take turns each day, using the equipment while it was available (compromise). Another alternative is to synergize. Here, the teachers would understand each other's needs and desires. They would listen to each other and to other instructors, perhaps at a staff meeting. They would brainstorm and generate alternatives. Perhaps they could both use the equipment at the same time by combining their classes, creating stations, generating related and supporting activities that could be done simultaneously, arranging equipment in new ways, or using nontraditional or old equipment to do the same gymnastics skills.

In order to synergize, one has to be willing to see the different perspectives of others. Effective coaches recognize that what they see and perceive may not be the only way. This makes them more receptive to new ideas and more willing to accept alternatives. This affirms others and helps to build trusting relationships with them. Will others, as a result, be more likely to accept ideas? Probably so.

It may be difficult to get all of one's colleagues to work synergistically. Some just refuse, but that should not prevent individuals from listening empathically, from seeking to understand, from being open to others' ideas, and from continuing to create positive energy. Covey suggested that the seven habits themselves are synergistic. They are more effective in sum, rather than independently.

7. SHARPEN THE SAW.

To "sharpen the saw" is to take care of oneself. Covey (1989) referred to it as "investment in ourselves" (p 289). Generally speaking, it is each person taking care of his or her physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual dimensions. This is what enables someone to be effective and productive. Taking the time to sharpen the saw is being proactive. If individuals address habit seven, they are giving themselves a greater ability to practice the other habits.

The physical dimension is evident to gymnastics instructors because it is what they teach and profess

each day to their students. It is about taking care of the body. Adults often say, "I don't have time to exercise today," but if they viewed physical activity as a necessity, they would not omit it. Effective individuals take the time to exercise.

The spiritual dimension revolves around one's value system (Habit 2). It is what inspires each person. Some people meditate; some reflect quietly in a peaceful place, some read scripture and pray, others find solitude in nature. Working on one's spiritual dimension often means going back to the personal mission statement and seeing life through that vision. One can logically expect that people who live their core values will be very much "at peace" spiritually.



A lot of gymnastics coaches have challenged their mental dimensions by going to college. Most continue to do so by working on advanced degrees on continuing education. Covey pointed out that addressing one's mental dimension does not require classes. It can be accomplished through any of a number of endeavors, and proactive people find those avenues. Writing and reading can contribute to intellectual and cultural growth. Serving on a volunteer committee can be quite challenging. When coaches learn new activities or drills to teach students, they must research, read, and perhaps learn new skills, all of which are mentally stimulating. Effective individuals think of what challenges them, and they do it.

Covey argued that an individual's emotional life revolves around relationships. To enhance the social/emotional dimensions, people must examine their interactions with others and ensure that those interactions incorporate habits four, five, and six. The interactions do not necessarily have to occur with friends; interactions with co-workers or the gym owner fall within this dimension, as well.

Most people have been in situations where they have dreaded a necessary conversation or what might be predicted as a confrontation. Perhaps by accident, both people practiced habits four, five, and six. After the conversation, both felt renewed, excited, relieved, and optimistic. They may not have recognized that they were accommodating their social/emotional dimensions; they just knew that they felt good afterwards.

Covey also suggested that one could be rewarded in the

social/emotional dimension by service to others. Most people know how personally rewarding it is when they do something for someone on a volunteer basis, for no compensation (or, in many cases, recognition), only because they want to help.

Effective people make a conscientious effort to sharpen the saw. They are proactive about taking care of themselves because they know it makes them more productive and positive, while receiving personal satisfaction at the same time.

CONCLUSION

Although these habits were not written specifically for gymnastics coaches, they certainly apply. The information presented here does not include all of Covey's concepts, but it is hoped that it captures the main ideas and suggestions. You are probably thinking that cultivating all these habits will produce no benefit if the people with whom you work do not do the same. However, as some of the examples have shown, it may not be necessary for the other person to practice each of the habits. Furthermore, by your behaviors you can assist others in practicing the habits. If you listen empathically, the other person is more likely to listen to you. If you seek to understand the other person, they are more willing to try to understand you.

Attempting to apply all seven habits at once is not possible if you choose to do it correctly. It is best to focus on the first habit, and implement it to some degree before applying the next. In fact, some are prerequisites to each other. Practicing habit one means you take charge. Habit two involves the creation of your mission. Habit three is the actualization of your mission. Habit four is the way you should accomplish your mission. Habits five, six, and seven allow you to be effective with others. And habit seven allows you to practice all the other habits better.

These habits not only help you become more effective as a colleague in a gym, they help you become more effective as a teacher, a partner, a parent, and a friend. The best start is to recognize that the ability to become an effective gymnastics instructor is in the hands of each person — it is a choice.

Human Resources Samples

- [360-degree Performance Review Form](#)
- [Anti-Harassment Policy](#)
- [At-Will Employment Acknowledgement](#)
- [Daily Time Record](#)
- [Drug Free Workplace Policy](#)
- [Employee Code of Conduct](#)
- [Employee Emergency Notification Form](#)
- [Exit Interview](#)
- [Orientation Checklist](#)
- [Employee Satisfaction Form](#)
- [Employee Satisfaction Survey](#)
- [Warning Notice](#)
- [Severance Agreement](#)
- [Independent Contractor Agreement](#)
- [Mandated Reporter Acknowledgement](#)
- [Performance Planning Worksheet](#)
- [Receipt of Employee Guidebook](#)
- [Receipt of Key](#)
- [Receipt of Uniform](#)
- [Supervisor Performance Evaluation](#)
- [Teacher Observation](#)
- [Technology Policy](#)
- [Time Off Policy](#)
- [Violence Prevention Policy](#)

Key Points

- Recruiting, interviewing, and hiring employees is subject to many laws. Gym owners should be aware of fair labor practices, equal employment opportunities, and other personnel regulations. Require and contact references for all potential employees to help avoid wrongful hiring.
- Gym owners may wish to take advantage of using independent contractors to teach classes and avoid the tax implications of paid staff. Caution should be exercised in order to ensure compliance with IRS criteria.
- USA Gymnastics / National Center for Safety Initiatives background checks should be conducted for every employee, as should TB testing, to protect the children and the gym.
- Participating in the USA Gymnastics We Care Campaign and the US Olympic Committee Safe Sport Program are great steps to help prevent child abuse.
- After hiring, all staff should receive a copy of the employment manual, proper orientation, training, and mentoring. The gym owner is ultimately responsible for the actions of the employee while working.
- USA Gymnastics University training, seminars, workshops, and certifications are an excellent way to develop a gymnastics professional.
- Staff should receive regular feedback on their performance, with a written review at least annually.



THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS IS FOR CLUB OWNERS AND PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS. THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS HELPS INDIVIDUALS DEVELOP STRONG LEADERSHIP SKILLS, PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES, AND POSITIVE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT CAPABILITIES.

THERE ARE FOUR DIFFERENT CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS. EACH CERTIFICATE ADDRESSES VARIOUS BUSINESS ISSUES, ACCORDING TO THE EXPERIENCE ONE HAS AND THE DEGREE OF KNOWLEDGE ONE DESIRES.

THE CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS ARE PROGRESSIVE AND ONE MUST COMPLETE ONE CERTIFICATE LEVEL PRIOR TO MOVING TO THE NEXT. COURSEWORK FOR THE NEXT CERTIFICATE PROGRAM CAN BE PURSUED AT ANY TIME.

**ADMINISTRATOR
MANAGER
DIRECTOR
EXECUTIVE**

CHAPTER SEVEN

GYMNASTICS OPERATIONS



USA Gymnastics Programs

USA Gymnastics is the sole national governing body (NGB) for the sport of gymnastics in the United States. It gets this designation from the International Olympic Committee and the International Gymnastics Federation. USA Gymnastics sets the rules and policies that govern gymnastics in this country. Training and selecting the U.S. Gymnastics Teams for the Olympics and World Championships are just two of the many responsibilities of USA Gymnastics.

The not-for-profit organization was established in Tucson, Ariz., in 1963. During the mid-1960s the U.S. had scarcely 7,000 athletes competing a limited schedule. The only major international events for gymnasts were the Olympic Games and the Pan American Games.

Today, more than 200,000 athletes are registered in competitive programs through USA Gymnastics. USA Gymnastics has more than 15,000 professional and instructor members. Approximately 3,000 competitions and events throughout the U.S. are sanctioned annually. USA Gymnastics is headquartered in Indianapolis, Ind., with several other sports' NGBs and has expanded very quickly in its 30 plus years. The original staff of three has grown to approximately 40 employees maintaining the following areas:

Program Departments

This area consists of Acrobatic Gymnastics, Group Gymnastics, Men's Artistic Gymnastics, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Trampoline & Tumbling, and Women's Artistic Gymnastics programs. They are responsible for all aspects of athlete, coach and official selection and development. This includes conducting clinics, training camps and competitions; coordinating gymnastics delegations to national and international competitions; and providing support for the athletes and coaches who represent the United States here and abroad.

Many different gymnastics plans are developed for all ages and skill levels from grassroots to advanced. The programs generate compulsory exercises for developing gymnasts and rulebooks for registered athletes, coaches and clubs.

Member Services

Member Services offers a variety of membership programs to all corners of the gymnastics community

including gymnasts (both competitive and recreational), coaches, judges, instructors, clubs, parents, fans and gymnastics related businesses. Currently, nearly 100,000 individuals are USA Gymnastics members. For more information about each program's benefits and how to apply, click here or call Member Services at 1-800-345-4719.

Events

This department annually conducts and produces five to six nationally televised events including national championships and international invitational meets. This includes all aspects of the event from site selection to venue staging and production of the entire competition. Also, this department arranges delegation travel and housing and tends to the needs of USA Gymnastics' national and international guests.

Marketing

The marketing department encompasses the areas of communications, corporate sponsorships, and television sales. The department's goal is to generate exposure for gymnastics to the public and recognition for USA Gymnastics' corporate partners.

Communications

Through the media and public relations efforts, this department strives to increase the public's awareness of USA Gymnastics and its athletes, coaches, events, and programs. The department also provides information to USA Gymnastics Online, which can be viewed by clicking here.

USA Gymnastics publications produces two magazines including *USA Gymnastics*, a quarterly, four-color publication geared toward the athlete, coach and gymnastics enthusiast, and *Technique*, a bi-monthly magazine, a technical publication designed for professional members of the sport. In addition, the communications/media department produces media guides, newsletters, event programs, reports, the Congress Proceedings Book and other promotional items used to generate exposure for the sport.

U.S. National Gymnastics Team

The ultimate achievement for athletes involved in USA Gymnastics' national programs is winning a place on the National Team while working towards competing at the Olympic Games. Each National Team Member works his/her way through a structured system of

competition. U.S. men's team members are mostly products of private clubs or collegiate gymnastics programs while most of the U.S. women's and rhythmic team members come from private clubs and organizations.

Every potential Olympian must win a place on the National Team through a selection process. This process is supervised by USA Gymnastics, the umbrella organization composed of 22 Constituent Organizations (listed at below), which are the back-bone of gymnastics in the U.S., and helps participants advance from the grassroots to the Olympic level.

Gym Culture

Every gym has its own unique culture. There are a lot of articles written on creating culture in your organization. Culture is a result of the values of the individuals within the organization. The behaviors of staff, and even the students and parents, define a gym's culture. This culture is based on the vision, the mission, and the values for the business. This article is not intended to be the end-all for strategic planning, and I am certain there will be debate about the terms and process I propose, but the important thing is for you to define your culture.

All successful leaders have a vision for their businesses, programs or teams. In fact, you are not a leader if you don't have vision, if you can't see exciting possibilities not only in your programs, but also in your people. And, yet, many leaders when asked to create a vision statement for their gym tend to minimize the importance of this process. They often give it lip service, so they can get back to the "real work." This is too bad, because ethics and culture are the foundation for your organization.

An in-depth, thoughtful vision process can be a major motivator. An authentic vision comes from your soul, your team's soul, and touches the heart. A team that is emotionally moved by their vision has the strength to overcome the rough spots and the ups and downs any business faces. When the team has a clear vision for the gym, they are creating a picture of the future. They can then work backwards, identifying priorities and what needs to be done to actualize the end result.

To know the potential and possibilities of your organization, assess where you are, your strengths, your vulnerabilities, your competition, and society's

trends. This is a traditional SWOT (or SWOC) exercise – identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (or challenges).

- Conduct a thorough internal and external environmental scan.
- Identify all stakeholders – internal and external
- Identify key questions for environmental scan
- Administer a reliable employee (internal stakeholder) satisfaction survey
- Conduct customer (external stakeholder) focus groups
- Analyze stakeholder needs and impact
- Consider using an "outside" facilitator if necessary



A vision is a picture of the future you seek to create, described in the present tense, as if it were happening now. It shows where you want to go in the next few years, and what it will be like when you get there. The word comes from the Latin "videre," to see. Criteria to consider in writing a vision statement include: strategic focus and market place competitive advantage, adding value, building on current strengths, and embracing the organizational values. Vision should provide the driving force. It should be clear, specific and simple.

Everyone in the organization should be able to speak it, feel it, act on it, and integrate it. It is challenging to craft a good vision statement. It must reflect present actions while representing the desired future. It must factor in existing competencies while identifying what's missing and how to overcome any limitations. Developing a vision statement will help you identify and align priorities.

An example of a value-based vision statement: *"We will strive to insure that GymStars is a safe, clean, educational, and fun gym, in which the students are engaged in their learning."*

Seek answers to these questions from stakeholders:

- What kind of company, organization, or team do we want to become?
- What reputation would we have?
- What contribution would we make?
- Would our services, products expand?
- Would our customer base change?
- How would our people work together?
- What values would we embody?

Values are the basis for a solid vision statement. Values are the standards and principles upon which behaviors and decisions are made. A true value is something you are not willing to compromise. Values affect your actions and choices. They establish how you expect to be treated, and how you treat your customers and employees.

Values provide a sense of continuity by creating common interests. Because values are tied to your belief system, they form the bedrock of your moral system (culture). As such, they create meaning in your business and life and provide guidance on how to treat others.

Even if they are unable to articulate them, every employee in your company already has a set of personal values by which they live. Values are intrinsic and personal. When you have meaningful dialog about values, you begin to see where employee priorities lie. By aligning employee and company values, you build an environment that is congruent. You build loyalty. We all want to work in places that reflect our personal values. For example, a perfectionist coach who values high quality and thoroughness will soon feel discouraged, demotivated, and become unproductive working for someone who values quantity (MORE classes!) above all else.

Hold Company Wide Values Discussions

Holding company-wide value discussions will help to form your value system. Conduct a group brainstorming exercise to create an appropriate list of values. Distribute to all personnel to prioritize and identify top priority values. Hold facilitated team discussions to define the importance of your top values. Our staff created an acronym to help everyone remember our organizational values – ACTION = Accountability, Customer Service, Teamwork, Innovation, Open Communication, and a Nurturing Environment.

Values and Ethics

Publish your vision, values, and mission statement. Act according to your published values. Conduct ethical awareness training for employees. Clearly define policies and lines of responsibility. Encourage open discussion of all subjects, especially controversial ones. Weigh all decisions against your published vision, values, and mission to ensure consistency.

Each leader and each team can define their own expectations. How will they put their values into play? What procedures can they agree to? How will they distribute responsibilities? How will meetings be conducted? What will be the lines of communication? How do problems get resolved? Clearly articulated organizational values do make a significant difference

in the lives of employees, as well as in performance. Values are the bedrock of all company cultures. Working globally, values become even more important to understand and respect. Paying attention to values, discussing them, and honoring them can build teams and prevent unnecessary conflict.

Vision, values, and mission form a firm a basis on which you can build your business. It is important to communicate your vision, values, and mission to everyone involved in your business. Employees can better see how their actions contribute to the overall organization. Suppliers can suggest products and services that better meet your needs. Your booster clubs and support groups can make more meaningful recommendations. Your customers can appreciate what you stand for and can support you. Remember, to reinforce a value-based culture for your business or team, try the steps outlined in this article. Conduct your internal and external environmental scan, assess your stakeholders, and gain consensus on the organizational values through a meaningful process of creating your gym culture.

Develop a Code of Behavior

Discuss behavioral expectations based on the values of the organization. Gain consensus on a company code of behavior. Be very specific and make behaviors measurable. Discuss the consequences for breaking agreements, and not following gym values by defining “character” and the expectations of the gym. This Code should be communicated during the hiring process and reviewed regularly. All staff (including the gym owner) should abide by these ethics.

Improving Operations Checklist

- Do ways exist to utilize staff better... handle more work in the time available to reduce idle time?
- Is staff doing work tasks that don't need to be done or aren't really that important?
- Can we use our equipment or supplies better?
- Can some of the work you do be done more efficiently or less costly by different personnel?
- Can some of your work tasks be done better or at less cost at different locations?
- Can we reduce or reorganize some of our operations?
- Do ways exist to reduce safety hazards?
- Can we reduce the costs of some of the services or supplies we purchase?
- Are any of our service levels too high?
- Do we have any equipment or apparatus that needs to be replaced?
- Are we spending our time on high priority work?

Post-Registration Customer Service

Gym owners spend a lot of time and energy to get a new student into the gym. But most gym owners don't spend enough time trying to keep that student. Client neglect is a real problem for most businesses, and it can reach epidemic proportions if not dealt with. Client neglect can turn a customer into a customer with buyer's remorse. A neglected or remorseful customer is usually not a customer for very long.

Not to worry: The cure requires only a bit of strategy and technique. The best practices to follow to help avoid buyer's remorse are outlined in a few easy steps:

1. Always congratulate your customer for making a wise decision. As soon as a customer agrees to sign up for a class or a team, assure her that other wise consumers (caring mothers like her, supportive families such as theirs, etc.) have been happy with their decision, and you're certain she will be equally pleased.
2. Always send a thank-you note. I was fortunately trained early on that sending a thank-you note after each new student registration was not optional. As a matter of fact, the registration wasn't complete until I sent a note. As much as I may have wanted to save a few minutes by not sending thank-you notes, and often considered the practice a pain, I quickly discovered their value by the positive customer responses and referrals the gym received. Although a quick e-mail thank you is good, a hand-written card mailed to the family means much more.
3. Get your client actively engaged in the program as quickly as possible. Many families are eager to become part of the community of the gym and are looking for ways to get involved. Have a select group of projects that help guide that energy and keep those new gym moms positively involved. One job I delegated to a new volunteer was to address and file birthday cards for our students. Yes, we actually sent birthday cards to every student in the gym (kind of a follow-up to best practice number 2). This kept the parent busy and they felt part of the gym. Having a volunteer to stuff envelopes or put labels on flyers while they sit in the bleachers watching their child in class is a win-win situation.
4. Another great strategy is to simply meet and greet on a regular basis. If you don't spend a good portion of time in the viewing area schmoozing with the parents, you are missing a great opportunity to avoid client neglect. People are much more likely to talk badly about you when you aren't around. Get out of your office to make yourself available and allocate a lot of face-to-face time with your customers.

While these practices may seem to take a lot of time, and you might consider them unnecessary, they can really help sustain your gym. We don't have a crystal ball to tell us which customers are at the highest risk for canceling. But rolling these actions into your business will help more of your students stick around for more sessions and seasons.

Teaching Gymnastics

Operating a gymnastics center means that your primary business activity will likely be teaching gymnastics. Being an excellent teacher is a skill that only a select few can claim. However, just like every gym owner can become a better businessperson, every instructor can become a better teacher. Your organization should encourage lifelong learning and require professional development of staff.

Benefits of Participation in Gymnastics

At the conclusion of an extended program of gymnastics a gymnast should demonstrate Physical Benefits:

- An increase in muscular strength, flexibility and endurance.
- The ability to relax and stretch safely.
- Correct alignment while walking, standing, jumping etc.
- The knowledge of how to land, fall and roll safely.
- Increased agility and coordination

At the conclusion of an extended program a gymnast should demonstrate Cognitive Benefits:

- Awareness of the body.
- Awareness of space and where the body is in it (under, over, etc.).
- Awareness of time and how the body reacts (quick, slow, etc.).
- Aware of relationships: body parts to each other and the apparatus.
- Awareness of relationships with other students, coaches, etc.

At the conclusion of an extended program a gymnast should demonstrate Psychological Benefits:

- The joy of movement mastery.
- Discipline and self-control.
- The exercise habit as a pleasurable daily occurrence – movement is pleasurable and desired.
- A confident self-image and a positive attitude towards their bodies – move from a world of "I can't" to "I can."
- Trust in one's own abilities.

Values of Discipline

- Define the boundaries for each student (before the need to enforce them).
- When defiantly challenged, respond with confidence and decisiveness.
- Distinguish between childish tantrums, lack of responsibility and willful defiance.
- Reassure and teach after the confrontation.
- Avoid impossible demands.
- Do not take action when you are mad or angry.

In Depth

Operations for a gymnastics business are synonymous with teaching gymnastics. Sound business operations are as important as sound fundamentals for gymnastics. Systems must be in place and diligently followed for all policies and procedures in order for a gym to thrive. Operating a gymnastics business has many similarities with any other business, but also has many unique characteristics. As mentioned in this chapter, a good gymnast does not automatically make for a successful businessperson. Likewise, a good businessperson may not be able to operate a prosperous gymnastics center. Managing programs, staff, students, parents, and administrative operations demand a high level of professionalism, support and care.

Statistical Benefits of Gymnastics

It happens many times a day all across the country. A parent will call their local gymnastics club and ask questions about the program. The parents often say something like, "I don't really want my child to be a gymnast, but it would be nice if they could learn a cartwheel; I just think it would be really good for them." The questions these parents have about the gymnastics program are typically, "How much does it cost?" "When are the classes?" and "What will they learn?"

Answering these questions can be an involved process. The cost per lesson is a few dollars. Classes are held at certain times on certain days. What a child learns in gymnastics can take more time to explain. Sure those gymnastics teachers are helping their young athletes learn cartwheels and back handsprings. Coaches are teaching vault, bars, spotting giants and twists, but what else is being learned?

The parent who states that they think, "...gymnastics would probably be good for their child" might be

surprised to know just how good it is. With pediatric obesity at an epidemic level of 17% of children and adolescents in the United States, getting children away from the television or computer games and into the gym is a terrific first step toward a healthy lifestyle. The researchers at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that youth, who undertake lifestyle exercise programs that increase physical activity, reduce the intake of high-caloric foods and involve parents have the best chance of preventing and reducing obesity over the long-term. Gymnastics is perhaps one of the most comprehensive "lifestyle exercise programs" available to children, incorporating strength, flexibility, speed, balance, coordination, power and discipline.

- Studies show that children learn cognitive skills more effectively in an environment that includes the body as well as the mind (Barrett, 1998). Gymnastics and early childhood movement education is directly attributed to developing neurological pathways in students and promoting reading readiness. While the preschool gymnastics teacher runs about and plays with the little kids in her class, she is preparing her students for successful experiences in school; children who have participated in movement education activities have longer attention spans, increased communication skills, general problem solving skills and improved self-esteem.
- Researchers at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School found a relationship between physical activity and children's self-esteem. The more time children ages 10 to 16 spent being active, the higher their self-efficacy and self-esteem were reported to be (Strauss RS, Rodzilsky D, Burack G, Colin M., 2001).
- European researchers found that physical fitness in children related to a reduced risk of developing asthma during adolescence (Rasmussen, Lambrecht, Siersted, Hansen & Hansen, 2000).
- Physical activity is instrumental in preventing certain cancers; from colon cancer and breast cancer to prostate cancer (Merrett, Theis & Ashbury, 2000). Increased exercise helped reduce the risk of developing diabetes by 58% (Yale University School of Medicine, 2001). Beginning a physical activity such as gymnastics at an early age is no guarantee but active children are more likely to grow up to be active and healthy adults.
- In a study of school-aged youth, researchers found that physical training programs that incorporate life skills decrease the risk of substance abuse by adolescents. Better school attendance, lower anxiety and depression, and decreased use of tobacco and alcohol were all reported

after a twelve-week physical training program (Collingwood, Sunderlin, Reynolds & Kohl, 2000). Recreational sports activities, including gymnastics is a key to balanced human development and has been proven to be a significant factor in reducing alcohol and drug use (Williams, 1994).

- The gymnastics team coach is directly responsible for reducing the crime rate in the city; statistics show that children actively engaged in organized “positive choice” extra-curricular activities such as youth sports are less likely to be involved in self-destructive and anti-social behavior and juvenile crime (Soenstrom, 1986).
- Physical activity has been proven to delay the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in adolescents with hypertension (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999).
- Many studies have reported the benefit of moderate impact activities such as gymnastics has on the development of bone density and the prevention of osteoporosis. Plyometric exercises (also known as jump training) like tumbling and vaulting have been determined by the American College of Sports Medicine to be a safe, beneficial and fun activity for children.
- In a 2014 paper published in Pediatrics, researchers report that kids 7 to 9 years old, who attended a daily, after-school fitness program showed an increased ability to pay attention, avoid distraction and switch between tasks at the end of a nine-month period, compared with a control group that did not attend the program.
- Healthy activities like gymnastics keep our kids off the couch and engaged in a healthy lifestyle. That intermediate gymnastics class teacher is contributing to lower health care costs in the United States; active children are more likely to grow to become active and healthier adults, reducing the burden on the health care system. Sedentary lifestyles have been linked to the development of coronary heart disease, diabetes mellitus and numerous other chronic ailments. Nurturing the enjoyment of movement and motor skill development at an early age will help to promote continued participation in physical activity. Long range, these active and therefore healthier adults are more likely to be more productive at work, take less sick days, and have fewer “on the job” accidents (Paffenbarger, 1986).

In addition to all of the above, gymnastics provides children with an opportunity to meet with friends or make new friends and have fun! Gymnastics also contributes to the immediate economic vitality of your local community; gym owners pay rent, employ people, pay taxes and purchase goods.

The Coaches Role in Developing Assets in Youth

Young people today, more than ever, need adults who can help them grow into strong healthy, caring, productive young people. Adults do this by teaching youth positive skills, attitudes and behaviors called “developmental assets.” Just as financial assets allow a person to weather difficult times and to plan for a positive future, “developmental assets” provide the emotional resources youth need to avoid problems and to be successful. Research by the Search Institute of Minneapolis has identified 40 assets that are essential for youth to blossom into productive citizens. The more assets a young person has, the more likely he or she is to succeed in school, stay healthy, and volunteer in the community. The fewer assets available to a youth, the more likely he or she is to try alcohol or drugs, commit a crime, or do poorly in school. Parents, teachers, coaches, faith communities, business leaders, everyone, can help build assets in our youth. In fact, we need everyone to work together to create the kind of community where all youth thrive.

Coaches have a unique and powerful role to play in building assets in young people. They can be the adults to whom youth turn for advice. They can model responsible, caring interactions with others. They can motivate youth to achieve new goals. A coach can make all the difference in the world to a young person... especially a young person who doesn't have many assets to begin with.

A teacher's choice of words can have a huge impact on your students - even if you think they're not paying attention. The way you phrase a request, a response, or a compliment can inspire them to be cooperative and confident, or leave them feeling defiant and discouraged. Coaching communication is a difficult prospect at best. Our job is to motivate and encourage while we critique and correct. What you say to your athletes and how you say it can make the difference between success and failure.

The Five Best Practice Things to Say When You Coach:

1. “The choice is yours.”

If you use this phrase when asking your athlete to do something - or stop doing something - you make it clear that she is responsible for her own actions. For example, you might tell a chatty gymnast and her friend at the chalk bowl, “The choice is yours; pay attention and follow the assignment or call your mother to pick you up.” If they’re still chatting with one another five minutes later, you can follow up with, “I see that you’ve decided that you would rather go home.” Not only does this help teach the student about cause and effect, but it takes you out of the bad cop role; she will clearly understand that she’s making a decision to choose a consequence.

2. “I like you, but I don’t like that behavior.”

If you have to discipline your athletes, you want to separate the deed from the doer - so he understands that behaving badly doesn’t make him a bad person. Telling a child that you like them in the same sentence that you express disapproval also helps remind you that the goal of discipline is to teach a child what’s appropriate, not to punish him - and you’ll be much more likely to stay calm and not yell. Never forget your first job as a coach is to be a teacher and that you don’t really teach gymnastics, you teach children.

3. “I want you to help me solve my problem.”

If your athlete is doing something that annoys you - constantly tightening his grips out of nervous habit rather than necessity - make it seem as if you’re the one with the problem. Ask him to help you come up with a solution - perhaps he’ll only rip that velcro when you are over on vault. This way, he’ll feel as if his input is invited and respected, and he’s less likely to see you as his adversary. If the only solution that will satisfy you is for him to stop the behavior entirely, you can brainstorm about how he can remember not to do it.

4. “What did you really want to say?”

When kids get mad, they may blurt out harsh words - such as “You’re stupid!” or “I hate you” - because that’s all they can think of to say in the heat of the moment. But you can help your student dig deeper and figure out what exactly made her so furious. You might have to give her suggestions such as “Are you angry because you’re embarrassed?” or “Are you frustrated after trying so many times?” As a child learns to get more in touch with her feelings,

she’ll become better at articulating them with others, becoming a better communicator herself.

5. “Different people have different needs.”

When one of your students utters that familiar refrain, “It’s not fair!” you need to help him understand why everyone shouldn’t in fact be treated equally. This statement explains what “fair” really means: “Everyone on the team gets what he needs when he needs it.” If one of your athletes needs spotting on a difficult skill for example you certainly wouldn’t NOT spot him just to be fair to the other team members. It may not be fair that Ryan Rings missed two days of practice but maybe he had extra schoolwork to get done. When one athlete hits a week of practice and earns an anchor spot in the lineup, it doesn’t mean that everyone automatically gets to go last in a rotation.

There are also some “worst practice” things to say when you coach:

1. “Act your age.”

If a 9-year-old cries because someone called her a name (or worse, is ignoring her) she is acting her age. Although we’re certainly delighted when our team displays more mature behavior, the truth is that it’s still developmentally appropriate for them to be stubborn, needy, and self-centered. Lots of coaches forget that fact - because, let’s face it, childish behavior can be frustrating. However, when you tell a student to act his age, you’re issuing a blanket criticism without acknowledging why he might have been behaving that way. You’re really focusing on how his behavior affects you. Instead, try to tune in to his feelings, and preface your response with something empathetic like “You seem really angry” or “I know that it’s sad when something like this happens.”

2. “I was only teasing.”

Joking with your students may seem like a harmless way to help them develop a sense of humor, but teasing is likely to include put downs such as “You’d probably forget your head if it weren’t screwed on.” Despite what many people think, making fun of a child won’t prepare him for being teased by other kids any more than hitting him will toughen him up to face a bully. Creating an atmosphere of fun and excitement in the gym is great, but your job as a coach is to be caring and supportive, not cute or clever with insults that are disguised as humor. If you don’t really mean it, don’t say it.

3. “Why can’t you be more like your teammate?”

Comparisons like this are a surefire way to make your athlete feel like a second-class citizen and fuel internal rivalry. There is something to be said for a friendly competition in the gym, but this needs to come from the athletes and not the coaches. This is not an effective strategy to get a student to do her conditioning as quickly as her teammate does or focus on execution like another team member; they’ll only deflate a child’s confidence. The more you tell her she’s not good enough, the more likely she is to believe it. You need to accept your kids’ strengths and weaknesses, and encourage each child in a way that focuses on his or her own behavior.

4. “What did I just tell you?”

You obviously know the answer. This sarcastic question is really a thinly veiled accusation, and if your student were to actually respond to a question such as “Did you just bend your knees?” she would end up sounding like a smart aleck. If you’re irritated that your child hasn’t done what you’ve asked, say so: “I’m frustrated that I had to repeat this three times, but I’m going to tell you once more – “Keep your legs straight.”

5. “Don’t bend your knees (tap so late, throw your head back, etc.).”

Despite your best intentions - and the desire to provide good coaching feedback - such warnings will actually make him more likely to do what you’re asking them not to. You’re telling him that you expect him to fail, which is very discouraging for a child who’s working hard to become more independent. Instead, you might say, “Keep your legs straight.” That way, you’re focusing on the performance behavior you want, not his bent knees. Trying to keep your messages positive rather than negative takes practice. Give it a try.

Ten ways coaches can build assets every day

1. Ask youth for their ideas and listen, really listen, to their responses.
2. Give youth tasks and responsibilities they can handle.
3. Tell a youth what he or she is doing right twice as often as you point out mistakes.
4. Talk to athletes, other coaches, parents and officials with respect.
5. Show interest in youth beyond what he or she can do in the gym.
6. Set consistent and realistic expectations for behavior.
7. Demonstrate fairness and honesty in how athletes are treated.
8. Help youth learn from mistakes and losses by focusing on what they can each do to improve.
9. Talk with parents about how their child is doing and how they can support him or her.
10. Give youth a chance to make decisions

Core Teaching Principles

Attempts to “Fast-Track” children have a negative impact on the child, the other members in the class, and the teachers. The “implied pressure to learn” inevitably presents a skill based, results oriented program that manifests in the preadolescent years with burn-out and the “I can’t” or “I don’t care” attitude.

- Keep the kids safe
- Unconditional respect
- Clearly communicate expectations
- Catch kids doing things right
- Discipline with natural consequences
- Be enthusiastic
- Daily challenges / daily successes
- Perpetual motion
- Creativity, variety, FUN
- Love, empathy, compassion

Lesson Planning

Unfortunately, there is no GPS to help guide a gymnastics instructor to successful performance by their athletes. There is a map of sorts that can direct a teacher/coach, and that map is a lesson plan. A lesson plan is the instructor’s road map of what students need to learn and how it will be done effectively during the workout. Lesson planning is one of the most important responsibilities of teaching. Regardless of level – preschool, recreational, developmental, or competitive, every gymnastics instructor needs to plan his or her class lesson. Without a lesson plan, a coach/instructor is failing to fulfill a legal duty. If a teacher does not have a plan, they may get sidetracked from their instructional goals. Lesson plans give a gym owner a way to measure performance and the results of the instructors.

Before you plan your lesson, you will first need to identify the learning objectives for the class. Then, you can design appropriate learning activities and develop strategies to obtain feedback on student learning. A successful lesson plan addresses and integrates three key components: goals or objectives, learning activities, and class assessment.

Specifying concrete objectives for student learning will help determine the kinds of teaching and learning activities you will use in class, while those activities will define how you will check whether the learning objectives have been accomplished.

Preparing a lesson plan

Lesson planning is a learned skill. Good lesson plans develop over time and become easier as the coach / instructor gains experience in developing workouts. Lesson plans provide substitute teachers the information they need to take over a class they are not familiar with, and keep the class on the right path. Coaches prepared with a lesson plan set an example for their group and demonstrate a well-organized workout. Below are considerations to guide you when you create your lesson plans. Each step is meant to aid you in designing your teaching and learning activities. There are a large number of different formats and types of lesson plans, but the important thing is to have one!

Plan learning objectives

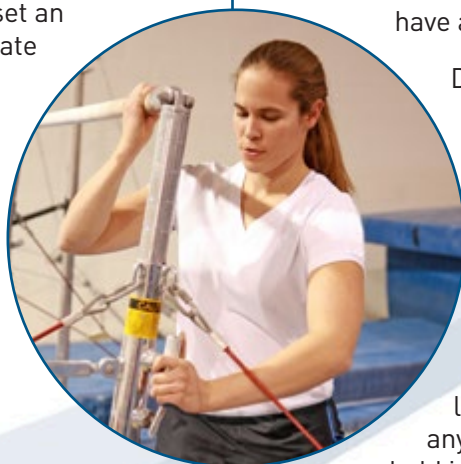
Every gym has a culture and mission. Each gym has different equipment, environments, and organizational operations. Teachers need to prepare their lesson plans within the structure of the gym. The first step is to determine what you want students to learn and be able to do at the end of class. Be clear with yourself and your students on what you want to teach. Decide what you want your athletes to accomplish at the end of class.

Once you outline the learning objectives for the class, prioritize them in terms of their importance. This step will prepare you for managing class time and accomplishing the more important objectives in case you are pressed for time. Consider the most important concepts, movement patterns, or skills you want students to be able to grasp and apply. Determine how and why are they important to if you ran out of time, which ones could not be omitted and conversely, which ones could be skipped if pressed for time. This will also act as a reminder if you get distracted during the workout, and suggest a level of professionalism and commitment.

Plan an introduction

Now that you have your learning objectives in order of their importance, design the specific activities you will use to get students to understand and apply what they have learned. Because you will have a diverse

body of students with different abilities and personal experiences, they may already be familiar with the skill. You might start with a question or activity to gauge students' knowledge of the drill / skill or possibly, their preconceived notions about it. For example, you can take a simple poll: "How many of you know what a back walkover is? Raise your hand if you have done one." You can also gather background information from your students prior to class by using student's skill progress cards and reading other instructor comments. This additional information can help shape your introduction, learning activities, etc. When you have an idea of the students' familiarity with the skill, you will also have a sense of what to focus on.



Develop a creative introduction to the activity to stimulate interest and encourage thinking. You can use a variety of approaches to engage students (i.e., personal anecdote, historical information about the skill, articulating figure display, drawings, short video clip [I like www.flashmavi.com/gymnastics for fun animated depictions the kids love], demonstration, etc.). Consider any preconceived notions or commonly held ideas (or possibly misconceptions) about this skill / drill that students might have.

Letting your students know what they will be learning and doing in class will help keep them more engaged and on track. You can share your lesson plan in a brief team meeting before class or by writing a brief schedule on a whiteboard or on the wall. You can outline on the board or on a handout the learning objectives for the class. Providing a meaningful organization of the class time can help students not only remember better, but also follow your direction and understand the rationale behind in-class activities. Having a clearly visible agenda (e.g., on the board) will also help you and students stay on track.

Plan a realistic timeline

Coaches know how easy it is to run out of time and not cover all of the many points they had planned to cover. When you prepare your lesson plan, estimate how much time you expect each activity will take. A list of ten learning objectives for each rotation is not realistic, so narrow down your plan to the two or three key concepts, ideas, or skills you want students to learn. Prepare slightly more than you expect to need in the event you have some extra time. Instructors must also understand that they will need to adjust their lesson plan during class depending on what the students need.

Your list of prioritized learning objectives will help you make decisions on the spot and adjust your lesson plan as needed. Having additional exercises or alternative activities will also allow you to be flexible.

A realistic timeline will reflect your flexibility and readiness to adapt to the specific environment. If you have a 30-minute rotation on an event, don't plan 45 minutes of activity. Estimate how much time each of the activities will take, then plan some extra time for each, but not so much as rush through everything you have planned. Be flexible – be ready to adjust your lesson plan to students' needs and focus on what seems to be more productive rather than sticking to your original plan if necessary. Include in your plan a few minutes at the end of class to answer any questions and to sum up key points

Plan the specific learning activities

Prepare several different ways of explaining the material (biomechanical explanation, analogies, visuals, etc.) to catch the attention of more students and appeal to different learning styles. Visual learners learn more by watching and seeing the skill – either performed by another gymnast or on video. Auditory learners understand better by listening and hearing the techniques described. Kinesthetic learners learn through feeling and by doing the skill – and may require being manipulated (spotted) through certain body positions. Every gymnast learns in each of these styles, but usually has one dominant style. As you plan your exercises and activities, estimate how much time you will spend on each. Anticipate things that may go wrong (e.g. being bumped from your rotation). Be prepared and be flexible. Build in time for extended explanation or discussion as well as practice time, but also be prepared to move on quickly to different drills / skills, and to identify performance areas.

Develop a logical pattern to the lesson, connecting different activities toward the goals and objectives. Engage in smooth transitions between stations, and build on previous exercises /drills in a common sense way. Plan to include safety information in every lesson, whether proper landing techniques or cautioning about potential mistakes. The recipe for success is to follow established progressions, breaking down skills into easy to learn pieces, and then putting the pieces together to result in the skill you are teaching. Explain the development in activities and sequences of skills. The successful instructor will keep the students moving with a mixture of techniques, challenges, and activities that enhance the learning environment.

Each lesson should include time to review previously

taught skills / drills, time to introduce new skills, and include time to perform repetitions that encourage mastery of learned skills. While preschool and recreation lesson plans may focus on individual skill development, developmental and competitive team lesson plans will probably involve skill sequences. Regardless, lesson plans should also include elements of fun. Making lessons fun keep students engaged and encourages learning. Plan a variety of activities to keep students interested and avoid monotony. Plan lessons that are challenging and therefore motivating, but try to ensure an 80% chance of success. This gives the athlete enough of a sense of accomplishment to feel good about the class, but also allows for enough challenge within the class.

Contingencies must be a part of every plan. What to do when your plan just isn't working, how to challenge the talented students without discouraging the less skilled gymnast, and having alternative activities individualized for each student should be included in the lesson plan.

Plan to evaluate understanding and performance

Once you have explained the drill /skill and described it properly, you need to check for student understanding and execution. Think about specific questions you can ask students in order to check for understanding, such as "What did you feel during this exercise?" or "What did you see?" Obviously, observing the athlete's execution of the drill / skill is part of an instructor's duties. But providing observation alone is not quality coaching. "Your knees were bent" is an observation anyone can make. It is the coach's job to provide constructive feedback (i.e. "Straighten your legs by squeezing the muscles in your knees and legs right here and here.") on the performance is crucial to effective teaching. Of course it is essential that you make sure your athletes have mastered the fundamental movements before moving on to more advanced skills.

Plan some key phrases or cues you may need to use as you coach. Positive feedback is easier when planned. Avoid reactive negative instruction such as "don't bend your legs" or "don't throw your head back" by planning on phrases you might need (e.g. "try it with straight legs" or "keep your head neutral.").

An important strategy that will also help you with time management is to anticipate students' questions or problems with execution. When planning your lesson, decide what kinds of questions will be productive for discussion and what questions might sidetrack the class. Think about and decide on the balance between covering content (accomplishing your learning

objectives) and ensuring that students understand. Plan accordingly for difficult exercises /drills / skills taking longer to master.

Plan a conclusion and a preview

Go over the skills covered in class by summarizing the main points of the lesson. You can do this in a number of ways: you can state the main points yourself ("Today we did..."), you can ask a student to help you summarize them, or you can even ask all students what they think were the main points of the lesson. You can review the students' answers to gauge their understanding of the topic and then explain anything unclear. Conclude the lesson not only by summarizing the main points, but also by previewing the next lesson. Explain how the drill or conditioning exercise relates to the skill that's coming next. This preview will spur students' interest and help them connect the different drills and conditioning to the skills that they are attempting to learn.

Evaluating your lesson plan

Evaluation (post lesson review) is crucial to a coach's professional development. A lesson plan may not work as well as you had expected due to a number of extraneous circumstances. You should not get discouraged – it happens to even the most experienced teachers! Instead, take a few minutes after each class to reflect on what worked well and why, and what you could have done differently. Identifying successful and less successful organization of class time and activities makes it easier to adjust to the contingencies of the gym. For additional feedback on planning and managing class time, you can use student feedback, peer observation, viewing a videotape of your teaching, and consultation with a supervisor or another staff member.

The single most important consideration of your lesson plan is the documentation. As mentioned in the very first paragraph of this article is the legal duty to plan. The only way to prove you had a plan is to document it.

Conclusion

To be effective, the lesson plan does not have to be an exhaustive document that describes each and every possible scenario. Nor does it have to anticipate each and every student's response or question. Instead, it should provide you with a general outline of your teaching goals, learning objectives, and means to accomplish them. It is a reminder of what you want to do and how you want to do it. A productive lesson is not one in which everything goes exactly as planned, but one in which both students and instructor learn from each other. Just have a plan.

Teaching Don'ts

- Don't correct a student in front of others if you can help it...they will take much more notice if you talk privately.
- Don't be afraid to be firm...it makes children feel secure.
- Don't make a child feel smaller than they are...it only makes them behave stupidly "big".
- Don't make a child feel their mistakes are sins...it upsets their sense of values.
- Don't protect them from consequences...they need to learn that there are very real consequences.
- Don't take too much notice of complaints...sometimes they get more attention than they deserve.
- Don't nag...or children will protect themselves by not listening.
- Don't make rash promises...children feel badly let down when promises are broken.
- Don't tax a child's honesty...they are easily frightened into telling lies.
- Don't forget that children cannot explain themselves as well as they would like...they are often not very accurate.
- Don't be inconsistent...a student will become confused and lose faith in you.
- Don't put off questions...a student will stop asking, seek information elsewhere and then be labeled as a behavior problem.
- Don't label a child...there is a tendency to fulfill those labels.
- Don't even suggest that you are perfect and infallible...it is too much of a shock to discover the truth.
- Don't tell a child their fears are unfounded...they are terribly real and you can do much to reassure if you try to understand.
- Don't think it beneath your dignity to apologize...an honest apology makes a child feel surprisingly warm to you.
- Don't forget a child loves to experiment...please try and put up with it.
- Don't ever forget that a child needs lots of understanding...but you don't need to be told that.

Points of Good Supervision

In almost every lawsuit claiming negligence, lack of supervision is included as a cause of injury. Proper supervision is a legal duty for all instructors and perhaps the most crucial factor in a safe environment in the gym. Supervision includes monitoring not only the athletes, but also the facility and equipment, and the environment around the activity (e.g. distractions).

Best practices dictate that all participants are within the supervisor's field of vision at all times. In practical terms, the instructor/supervisor need to make a decision on how to provide direct supervision (teaching or spotting a skill) while maintaining indirect (visual and auditory) supervision. Typically the instructor / supervisor selects the activity with the highest risk and performs a closer and more direct supervision there while students perform independent of the supervisor's direct attention, but remaining within visual contact without turning around (USAG Safety Handbook 2009).

The first task of supervision is the removal of any hazards. Inspection of the facility, the equipment, and the environment should be performed before any activity is allowed. Make a practice of scanning the area and be aware of any mat problems, tripping hazards, obstructions, and the like. Pay special attention to walkways and traffic patterns between events. Set physical limits – Good physical limits should not exceed your ability to see and hear all that is going on.

One key factor to maintain quality supervision is to set and explain expectations daily with your students prior to activity. With clear communication that each student understands, each group you instruct should be given a daily review of your standards along with performance expectations as well. Going over expectations may also help before each activity.

Be aware of what is going on and what may happen. Many times we miss the signals of problems ahead. If we are aware of the group's or individual's moods we can step in to help steer the group in the right direction. A good supervisor recognizes potential problems and intervenes. Anticipate potential problem activities and adjust your supervision accordingly.

Use a head count every few minutes to insure accountability. Position yourself so you can react quickly. It's hard to keep a group together. There always seems to be someone wandering off. It also makes it hard to be in the right place at the right time.

Know your activity and location in advance to limit any potential challenges to your supervision. Know the participants and be aware of any potential challenges or strengths they may have. Be aware of overconfidence that could result in a student exceeding their abilities and end with an injury.

Never leave the students unattended. At all times, every student should be within the supervisor's field of vision. Policies and procedures should be in place for any transfer of supervision. Students are the responsibility of the gym until they leave the property and supervision is transferred back to another authority (e.g. parent/guardian). (Technique 1999). Know your limits of supervision. If you have too many students to supervise properly, stop the activity and ask for assistance. A supervisor should never be alone with a child. Ask another employee or a parent to stay until the last child is picked up.

If possible, put the responsibility of supervision on the participants – Very rarely does this happen in a new group right from the start. It is even less likely for younger groups. It can work, however, if expectations are set from the beginning and then reinforced through out the program. It starts in small ways.

New teachers are often concerned that they will not be seen as a "fun person" if they bring up expectations, rules, etc. too early in their contact with the students. Be assured there is no contradiction between being an enthusiastic, positive, fun teacher and enforcing the rules.

Class Management

In his book, "Positive Classroom Discipline," Fred Jones states, "The most widespread management technique at home and in the classroom is nag, nag, nag." You can avoid making that technique your teaching style and create a climate for learning by understanding student behavior and working to effectively manage your classes.

First, take into consideration your students. Each one is at a certain level, specific to their physical, cognitive and emotional development. Each student has a unique personality type – aggressive, passive, open, angry, or complacent, etc. Every student also has a preferred learning style, a method by which they best understand and learn – kinesthetically, visually, logically, interpersonally, intra-personally, etc. Everyone behaves differently in different situations and your job as a teacher/coach is to connect with each student and entice them to learn.

This responsibility to lead students in the learning process requires personal discipline and the ability to create a positive learning environment. As always, what works for one child does not always work for all



children. Much research has been done on human behavior, learning, and child development (Freud, Jung, Skinner, Piaget, etc.) and we can benefit from this information to create techniques for effective classes.

I offer the following as best practices of class management:

- **Choose your battles.**

Learn to selectively ignore behaviors that are not truly detrimental to your teaching objectives. Many times coaches/teachers complain about behaviors that are completely normal and should be expected but are not teacher directed and a matter of the teacher simply exerting their control. Keep your sense of perspective and your sense of humor.

- **Create a set of clear and concise needs and expectations.**

Student and teacher needs, rights, and expectations should be openly discussed on the first day of class and reviewed periodically. Students have a right to learn without being disrupted by others. They expect the teacher to facilitate learning by setting limits on disruptive student behavior. The student is expected to come to class prepared with a willingness to learn. The students are expected to behave respectfully to the teacher and to other students. Furthermore, the student is expected to accept the consequences of misbehavior. A teacher needs the full attention of each student and has the right to establish optimal learning environments. The teacher is expected to present interesting curricula, which meet the students' needs, to provide stimulating and useful lessons, and to always ask the students to be the best that they can be. Furthermore, the teacher is expected to use teaching practices, which are likely to motivate students to engage in worthwhile learning activities.

- **Create a warm and nurturing classroom environment.**

The gym should be a place where a student feels welcome and at home. Students need to feel safe and accepted. As such, ridicule and sarcasm are not allowed. Mutual respect and the Golden Rule is the key for maintaining this climate. The facility should be clean and pleasantly decorated, with equipment arranged to allow students to work cooperatively, as well as allowing the teacher to circulate freely and supervise efficiently. Each student deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. Students should be personally greeted at the door. They should be given as much personal attention as possible during and outside of class.

Although there are many causes of team spirit, a teacher's enthusiasm, level of concern for the students, and class involvement all can affect the level of class togetherness. This force can benefit cooperative learning, and make the lesson seem much more enjoyable.

- **Develop a set of rules and logical consequences.**

Teachers and students must democratically create discipline plans including rules with clear and effective consequences. The rules should be agreed upon and understood by everyone in the class. It should be understood that when rules are broken, consequences would be applied fairly and consistently. The teacher solicits help to develop a set of class rules and responsibilities. The ideal list would be short and reflect the concepts of mutual respect and personal responsibility. Logical consequences are results, which consistently follow certain behavior. They are explained in advance and agreed to by the students. It is hoped that by understanding the consequences of disruptive behavior, that students will make better choices. Consequences should be related to the misbehavior so the students can see the connection. For example, if a gymnast chooses not to work on their assignment, they will stay after class until the repetitions are finished.

Once the class has developed its list of rules, they should be displayed as a reminder to those who may wish to break them. This gives the teacher something to point at when requesting certain behavior to stop. Enforce these rules consistently and without preferential treatment or emotion.

- **Develop a comprehensive lesson plan and daily routine, yet remain flexible.**

Install class routines and procedures, which allow the student to know what is expected of them to begin and complete, work expeditiously. As part of an effective routine, it is best for students to begin work immediately after class begins. Warm-ups should include fun or interesting activities meaningfully occupy the student. The activity could lead directly into the day's lesson. Part of the class time should be spent covering the daily lesson. During this time it is understood that only one person speaks at a time. Don't talk too much! Use the first few minutes of class for lectures or presentations, then get the kids working.

Students who have questions are encouraged to raise their hands to ask them. Once the lesson has been presented, the teacher is free to answer individual student questions to give efficient help to

the students. It is important to be flexible as lesson plans can be affected by conditions beyond the control of the teacher (half the class is absent that day, excess heat, event rotation emergencies, etc.) There may be cases where class activities must be restructured or rescheduled to accommodate the changed conditions. It is possible, with some ingenuity, to make the situation a learning experience, beneficial to all.

- **Make learning more attractive and fun for the student.**

Gymnastics is for the students, and not for the teachers. It is important for the teacher to expend every effort necessary to make the lessons interesting, and the activities enjoyable. Remember that students need to be successful 80% of the time! The result will be an engaged and active participant in the learning process. Students respond well to the anticipation of preferred group activities. It is possible to get an entire class on task if the incentive is available to all students, and attractive to the entire group so as to merit extra effort. The incentive should be both stimulating to the students, and educationally valuable.

The teacher can make learning more attractive by giving a coherent and smoothly paced lesson presentation. Getting the lesson going, keeping it going with smooth transitions and avoiding abrupt changes that interfere with student activity are important in maintaining positive student behavior associated with being on task. Coaches should vary the way they present their lessons from day to day. They may demonstrate, lead a group activity or discussion, or have students work quietly on their own. Repetitions can become ruts if there is not some variety to spice things up. Teaching strategies should be congruent with student learning styles. The teacher should help the students develop learning goals, which are real, attainable, and a source of pride. Activities should be fun for the students.

- **Deal with misbehavior, quickly, consistently, and respectfully.**

Misbehavior is a disruption to your effectiveness as an educator. The time spent dealing with misbehaving would be better spent teaching the others. The best way to deal with misbehavior is by planning lessons that are so interesting and busy that the athletes do not have time to misbehave! But since kids are kids, at some point misbehavior will occur. It is essential that misbehavior be dealt with quickly and consistently with class defined consequences so everyone, including the

misbehaving student, can get back to learning. Body language, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and physical proximity all can be effective in promoting self-control by the student. It is important that a teacher be aware enough to be able to recognize when misbehavior may occur, and to have non-verbal methods to prevent escalation.

It is possible that a verbal reminder of the class rules and consequences will be all that is necessary to stop student misbehavior. Upon an act of misbehavior, a teacher may describe the action to the student and suggest an acceptable alternative action. The student usually only has to be reminded of what she is supposed to be doing. For example, "Instead of talking with your friends around the chalk box, I would like you to work on your ankle conditioning for the next five minutes. You can talk to your friends later."

If a teacher ignores an attention-seeking student, the misbehavior usually escalates to a level, which eventually cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is best if the teacher can redirect the student's behavior, and attempt to give the student attention when she is not demanding it. This method encourages students to seek motivation from within, instead of depending on attention from the coach.

It is important that the coach not engage in power struggles with students. It is best to redirect a power-seeking student's behavior by offering some position of responsibility or decision-making. Address the behavior, not the character of the student. The teacher has the power to build or destroy student self-concept and personal relationships. Good communication addresses the situation directly, letting the student decide whether their behavior is consistent with what they expect of themselves. To be effective, consequences must be applied consistently. They should never be harmful physically or psychologically to the student. When they are invoked, the student should understand that he has chosen them by misbehaving.

Sometimes students are unwilling to listen to the teacher. At this point, a teacher can help prevent misbehavior from escalating by talking (and listening) with the student privately, and rationally discuss the problem behavior. The privacy enhances the possibility for a constructive discussion. Confrontation with an unwilling student could make the teacher appear weak in front of the class. Know when to ask for help. Make parents your allies. Call early and often, using the word "concerned." When communicating a concern, be specific and descriptive.

- **When all else fails, respectfully remove the student from the class.**

Continued disruptions will not be tolerated in class. They are detrimental to the overall objective that all students will become active and effective learners. Therefore, such students will be respectfully removed from class, and dealt with unconventionally. If a student does not accept the consequence for breaking a class rule, then he or she will not be allowed to remain in the class until the consequence is accepted. This rule should be made clear to the students from the first day, and should be strictly enforced (with the gym owner's approval, of course).

There are a lot of resources available to help teachers manage their classes and it is not an easy task to keep a dozen active children focused and on task. Keep your perspective and sense of humor and remember that you are there for the kids. I always remind coaches of a favorite quote of mine from Plato, "Suffer not to teach a child, for knowledge acquired under compulsion hath no bearing upon the mind. Rather, find the natural bent so that the child may learn." Don't beat yourself up trying to keep the students in line and obeying your rules as you try to "teach;" it is more important that they are actively engaged in learning gymnastics.

The Five-Step Approach to Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution

Scenario: Two four-year old children run to get a yellow hula-hoop. They reach it simultaneously and start pulling on it, yelling "MINE!" One child starts stepping in front of the other child to block them from the hoop. OK teacher, how do you handle this?

If there is a safety concern (i.e. the children begin to push or shove) it may be necessary to physically intervene immediately. However, you have just been presented with a very important "teachable moment" that could benefit everyone involved – you, the two children involved as well as the children and parents observing the situation. Resist the impulse to get involved and resolve the situation for the children. Provide them with guidance only when necessary. Remember that our ultimate goal is to help the children learn how to take care of themselves – give them the opportunity to figure things out for themselves! Follow these 5 steps to resolve conflict:

1. Approach

- Close enough to intervene if necessary
- You've signaled your awareness and availability

At this point we hope the children will be able to resolve the situation to their mutual satisfaction. If there is no further conflict, if the children are able to resolve the issue themselves, no further action is necessary. If the children are not able to reach a mutually acceptable solution, it may be necessary to help them understand their feelings. Give them the tools to articulate what they are going through...

2. Define the Problem

- Describe the scene
- Reflect what the children have said
- NO JUDGMENTS, NO VALUES, NO SOLUTIONS
 - "It looks like you both want the yellow hoop."
 - "I see you are yelling at each other and are angry."

If the children are still not able to reach a mutually acceptable solution, it may be necessary to ask more questions in order to help them get to the root of the problem and to understand their emotions.

3. Gather Data

- Not directed toward pinpointing blame or fault.
- Drawing out details, defining problems.
- Help children communicate vs. slugging it out:
 - "How did this happen?"
 - "What do you want to tell her?"
 - "How could you solve this problem?"
 - "How could you use it without fighting?"

If the children are still involved in conflict, it may be necessary to provide a little direction without solving the problem for them...

4. Generate Alternatives

- Give children the job of thinking and figuring out what THEY are going to do to solve their problem.
- Be there to facilitate:
 - "How are we going to solve this problem?"
- Agree on a solution. For example, they might say:
 - "We could take turns."
 - "That's OK, she was there first, I will use a red hoop."
 - "We could both use it together."
 - "We could both do something else."
 - "No one could use it."
- Some of the things that the children come up with would never occur to us but will work well for them. For example, they might say:
 - "We could count to three and then switch using it."

If there is still no resolution, if the children have not been able to solve their own problem, only then it may require that the teacher become more actively involved...

5. Follow Through Physically

- Model appropriate behavior.
- Narrate the model behavior.

The bottom line goal is to resolve the social conflict. Last resort is to solve the problem if they can't:

- "It looks like this is too hard for you two to figure out. This is what we'll do..."

Remember to always start with as little intervention as the children need. The goal is to maximize the SELF-resolution. Don't "give a 5" (Follow Through Physically) when a 1 (Approach) or a 2 (Define Problem) will do.

So what do we accomplish when we learn good conflict resolutions skills? Some of the assets that have been identified are: creativity, empathy, appropriate assertiveness, cooperation, emotion management, negotiation skills, and appreciation of diversity. Gym owners/directors can use these conflict resolution skills just as effectively with problems that occur between staff members. Empower your employees to solve their own problems.

Student Responsibilities

Everyone has a responsibility to ensure a safe and comfortable learning environment, including the students themselves. Have clear rules and expectations for each class. Students are to wait in designated areas until directed into an activity by the teacher. No students are allowed in any area until a teacher is present to supervise.

"THE RULES"

- All children are to wait for the leader,
- Absolutely no horseplay,
- Describe proper behaviors,
- No gum or candy,
- Stay with the class group (or line when moving to new activity),
- No pushing, shoving, fighting, or name calling.

Teachers are responsible for a child from the moment their care is transferred to them until transferring the care back to another authority. If a child is dropped off early or is not picked up on time (generally left in the care of the gym) the gym is responsible for that child's well being. Please keep a very close eye on all your students and don't forget that extenuating circumstances do occur. If you are unable to locate the child's parent/guardian or caregiver in the gym lobby, help that child call home or transfer their care to the senior staff member or to the supervisor. If you notice a child wandering around, ask them if they need help. Do not let an unattended child go unsupervised!

Take attendance each and every class! Report any discrepancies to the supervisor.

There is so much more to a child's development than just Skill Mastery. The primary objective remains... FUN! Do not confuse having fun with the absence of learning. It is a proven fact that people learn faster and better when they enjoy the process. Well-adjusted learners form an early *and lifelong* association that defines any attempt to learn something new:

Challenge = Risk = Learning = FUN!

A child that is mentally, physically, and emotionally prepared to succeed will accomplish a healthy learning attitude that will avoid the opposite association that includes Fear and Failure. Wrap up learning in fun to avoid unnecessary anxiety.

A participant is least at risk when they are fully prepared to perform the skill being asked of them. A participant should be mentally ready to perform by fully understanding the skill and cognitively aware of what is expected. A participant must also be physically ready to perform by being strong enough, flexible enough, powerful enough, fast enough and generally physically able to perform the skill. The participant must also be emotionally ready to perform by being prepared on a psychological level – not overly confident, not overly fearful and focused on the task. A gymnast that is mentally and physically able to accomplish the skill and has the emotional foundation to perform will be concentrating on the task and typically tries harder. This ultimately leads to a greater chance of successfully completing the skill and therefore less likely at risk of failure and injury.

Positive Coaching a Competitive Gymnast

You may have found yourself in a position of trying to get a gymnast to perform a particular skill or drill and have that gymnast unable to complete the assignment or maybe simply refuse to try. How did you respond? Many coaches end up treating that gymnast as they were treated by their coaches back when they were athletes – often with threats and punishment. Back in the "old days" coaches were typically dictatorial disciplinarians in control of all aspects of practices and competitions with no room for anything but complete compliance with their directions. I remember being ordered to do 100 back handsprings before I was allowed to go home from a high school freshman gymnastics camp, simply for messing up on a single tumbling pass. What was accomplished by this method of coaching? The coach exerted his authority over me, I exercised self-restraint by not telling the coach to flip off, but did my tumbling

get any better? NO. In fact, I could have been injured.

The time for such negative coaching is past. It may take more effort and planning to be a positive coach but it does not necessarily take more time to produce upper level gymnasts. Successful coaches will outline the plan for athletic excellence and articulate the plan to the gymnasts. Coaches must accept that an athlete will ultimately set the pace, that there are no short cuts and resist trying to accelerate the learning curve. Regardless of the age of the competitive gymnast, coaches must engage the athlete to take responsibility for their own improvement and achievement. Too often, coaches live vicariously through the success of their gymnast and don't allow the athlete to make choices and accept the responsibility for their actions. Coaches need to learn to check their ego at the door.

There must be natural consequences for misbehavior but coaches need to create an environment that allows mistakes. If an athlete deliberately violates an established training rule, there should be a logical consequence; for example, arriving late for practice may result in staying late to make up the missed work; failure to attempt or complete assignments may result in being withdrawn from the next meet. Mistakes, however, should be an accepted part of workouts.

Mistakes need to be addressed and corrected but there should not be "punishment" included in the response to an error. Gymnasts must be allowed to learn from mistakes and helped (coached) to recognize and understand the mistake and the method to correct it. Gymnastics is certainly a difficult enough sport; most gymnasts do not intentionally make mistakes while performing. A gymnast that believes they will be punished or criticized no matter how hard they try will simply stop trying whereas an athlete that is relaxed and not performing under fear of retaliation by the coach for making a mistake will perform at an optimal level.

Coaches that use a young gymnast's age as an excuse to dominate and dictate are simply not developing the type of athlete that is self-reliant and self-motivated. Provided with positive choices and direction, even the youngest competitive gymnasts can learn to take charge of themselves and coaches will end up with motivated, goal oriented athletes. Like trying to put toothpaste back in a tube, you cannot take back negative comments once they are exclaimed.

I still see far too many coaches that discipline their athletes with "If you don't do it right this time, you'll have to do another 60 sit-ups." What can be gained

by assigning "extra" conditioning as a punishment for mistakes? Using exercise as a punishment is counter-productive in that we should be trying to teach our athletes to appreciate conditioning rather than equate exercise to a negative. What can be accomplished by assigning meaningless repetitions in the name of discipline? Skills repeated for the sake of repetition often lead to repetitive use injuries and little if any improvement is made in the skill. If an athlete balks or refuses to attempt an assigned skill, what benefit is there to send the child home as punishment for failing to try?

A positive coach realizes that there is a reason for the problem and will try to find an explanation in order to find the solution. If the gymnast is afraid, help the child recognize, address and overcome the fear.

Remember the parable of the argument between the Sun and the Wind? Both thought they were the strongest. To settle their argument, they selected a traveler walking on a road below them. The Wind said, "Watch, I'm so strong that I can blow the coat right off that person." The Wind blew and blew, and blew some more. The traveler simply wrapped his arms tighter and turned his back to prevent the coat from flying away. Finally, the Wind gave up and said, "It can't be done." The Sun smiled and said, "Perhaps there is another way." And the Sun began to beam down on the traveler. Soon the traveler loosened his tight hold on the coat as the air warmed him. As the Sun continued to radiate its warmth, the traveler relaxed, smiled, and began to look around, enjoying the scenery and the road ahead. And took off his coat!

When an athlete comes into your gym, how does it feel and what will they hear from you? Do they wrap their arms around themselves as protection from the negative environment and the words they hear? Or do your athletes feel comfortable to learn from their mistakes in a warm, positive setting without fear of retribution and public embarrassment?

Just as every athlete has physical differences in size, flexibility, strength and power, they also have psychological differences in personality and behavior. The challenge of positive coaching is recognizing the individual differences in each athlete and learning what motivates each to succeed. Coaches must look at their duty as developing strong character rather than creating athletic machines that perform to their bidding.

The strong individual is in control of their emotions and able to make wise decisions for themselves while

willing to take responsibility for their actions. An athlete that is confident and self-motivated is much more apt to work harder and longer at an assignment. Take the challenge; be a positive coach.

Parent Responsibilities

Judging by the headlines, it seems there is no shortage of stories about violence, thievery and other shenanigans in youth sports these days, with parents often the prime culprits. Whether it is trash talking, poor sportsmanship, verbal abuse or even physical assault, this type of parental conduct is not only sad and shocking, but downright despicable and dangerous.

Based on the media reports, we might conclude that there is more bad behavior in youth sport today than in the past. However, it may be that we are just better informed than ever before. I suspect that many readers are tempted to psychoanalyze the perpetrators in these stories to see what makes them tick. You know, you can drive yourself to distraction trying to figure out what motivates others.

Let me suggest a more productive alternative to resolve the problems that do exist in youth sport. In your own youth programs, consider taking a teacher or management approach to the unruly adults who roam the stands and sidelines at practices, meets and exhibitions.

Do you recall how some of your better teachers maintained order? They stated their expectations and laid down the rules. We followed them or suffered the consequences. If we knew we were going to get in trouble for not doing our homework or for misbehavior, we did what the teacher expected.

We can follow this same approach with parents and other adults who are involved with our sporting activities. We know that they “ought to” behave. As youth leaders, if we are not fully prepared to handle this responsibility, let us just spell out how our adults should behave. Parents and other adults associated with youth sport activities must behave. No exceptions. No excuses. Make sure parents are clear on your program’s rules. Here’s a constructive checklist you can give parents and other involved adults:

Parental Code of Conduct

- Exhibit exceptionally good social behavior at practice sessions, exhibitions, and meets or stay away from these activities.
- See that your children have the proper equipment.
- See that your children arrive at the stated time and are picked up at the stated time.

- Applaud all good effort and good performance or remain silent.
- Allow the coaches to coach without outside interference or influence.
- See that your children receive ample positive encouragement and hugs regardless of the outcome of their contests.
- Allow your children to play without negative pressure, verbal or physical.
- Support the coaches in what they want the athletes to learn.
- Treat the coaches and administrators with dignity and respect.
- Treat the judges with dignity and respect, even the student officials (e.g. timekeepers).
- See that your children do not intentionally abuse other players.
- Help your children adhere to the written and unwritten rules of honesty, fair play and good sportsmanship.
- Step in and assist or volunteer to help other gymnasts, the team or program when asked.
- Provide your children with extra instructional opportunities when possible.
- Provide your children with opportunities to learn other sports so that they have a more balanced development.
- See that your children do well in their school studies.

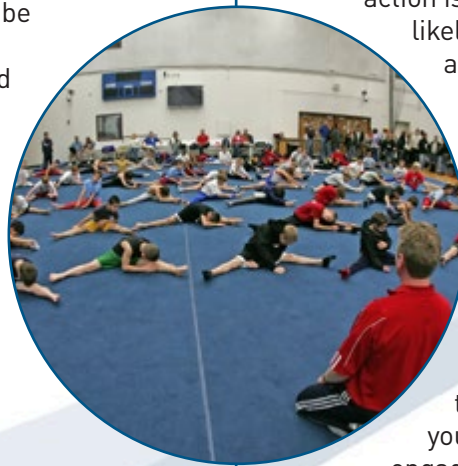
Now that we’ve established the expected rules of good behavior, how do you obtain the compliance of parents and other adults? Obviously, most people do comply without question. It is just a few others who get off track. They compel us to get the word out so that our standards of behavior become common knowledge and common practice.

Try these approaches:

- Hold preseason parent sessions at registration and other important gatherings.
- Conduct short pre-practice and post-practice huddles with parents.
- Conduct short pre-meet, between event, and post-meet huddles with parents
- Pass out the Parental Code of Conduct at all events, including awards ceremonies.
- Include the Parental Code of Conduct in every

program and newsletter.

- Pass out the Parental Code of Conduct reminder cards that specify good behavior at all events, including awards ceremonies.
- Appoint a Program Leader to be in charge of good behavior just as you would “Snack Parent.”
- Appoint a Sportsmanship Committee to promote and chronicle good behavior.
- Appoint a Video Patrol to keep an historical record of parent behavior. Use it to counsel those for whom compliance is a challenge.
- Appoint a Cordiality Committee to be responsible for and respond to instances of expected behavior and unwanted behavior.
- Ask the local police to respond to complaints about unruly adults. This should be the last resort.
- Ban the offending people, by court order, from practice sessions and all other program events.



There are many examples of poor fan behavior at televised sporting events. It may not have occurred to some adults that there should be different standards of behavior for youth events compared to college and professional events. Since we are not able to determine why people behave the way they do, I suggest that we not attempt it.

An objective in any gym or on any team is to establish and promote the standards of good behavior. Spread the word and then lay out the consequences of unacceptable behavior. By taking action that promotes good behavior, it will help our adults see the light.

Conducting Parent Booster Club Meetings

It is not mandatory that you have a Booster Club simply because you have a competitive team. If you choose to do so, you need to make sure that you have well-defined boundaries.

Unless you get a quick handle on your Booster Club, you will find that at least 50 percent of your booster club meetings are poorly run and a big waste of everyone’s time. Although the group may be parent directed, as the leader, you have a great opportunity to shape the meetings so they are more highly effective. Here are a few best practices that should help you get off on the right foot:

- At your first meeting, take ten minutes or so and ask the group to help set some ground rules that will form the “culture” for all future meetings. For example, start all meetings on time and end on time, come prepared, limit side conversations, differing views are welcome, respect all opinions, disagree in private but stand united in public, complete action plans you commit to, etc.
- Always use an agenda. If you can develop it in advance, all the better. Use e-mail to solicit agenda items a week in advance. When you are developing an agenda, keep in mind two important things: what action is required and how long the item is likely to take (as you solicit agenda items, also ask members to include that information). As the meeting starts, you can ask for additional items and prioritize them based on how much time you have.
 - Use a flip chart and markers or whiteboard. It’s a great way to record what the group is doing for all to see and engage the visual learners in the group. You may want to ask someone else to record while you lead the meeting, another way to engage participation. It keeps the meeting minutes visible and keeps everyone on track. It also avoids the problem of the “minute taker” recording his/her version of the meeting, only to find out later that it’s inadequate or biased.
- Summarize the action to be taken after each agenda item is completed; use the who, what, when, where and how format to recap the action. That way, you will always have clear assignments and you will avoid re-discussing the same items each meeting or between meetings.
- Start each meeting by following up on former action items that were assigned; this lets people know you are holding them accountable for things they agreed to do.
- Don’t do all the talking; call on people to draw out their opinions. For example, “Ginny GymMom, you’ve been on that committee before and have a lot of experience in that area, what do you think?”
- For big or political decisions, check in with people before the meeting; call people and find out which way they are leaning on an important vote or key decision. Most leaders know that it’s wise to lobby the group before hand and ratify the decision at the meeting. This not only makes the meeting time efficient, it limits surprises, grandstanding,

personal agendas and all the things that make political decisions messy.

- Don't let the windbags take up all the meeting time; if someone likes to hear themselves talk, wait for them to take a breath, summarize their comments and turn to the group and say, "So, what do the rest of you think?"
- Don't let the strongest (or most opinionated) members make all the decisions. It's your job to make sure everyone is heard and has an opportunity to share their views. In volunteer organizations, there often are people who use committee work to exert control and authority (in other words, they need a life). The rest of the group is counting on you to rein them in and make the discussion balanced.
- Stay action focused; don't let your meetings turn into a lot of long rehashing of issues. Make it clear that you want to come to a conclusion and move on. If you don't, attendance will drop off and people will begin to feel the meeting is not a good use of their time. If an issue is controversial and requires some additional study/information, create sub-groups to gather data and bring it to the meeting.

Let people add value; since they are not getting paid, they are participating for altruistic reasons. They have a vested interest because their child is involved, but if they don't feel their time, opinions, ideas and actions are being utilized, they will become disenchanted and drop out. Find out what people's personal motivations are and tap into them.

Consider using a skilled facilitator if the meeting outcome is crucial or the subject is contentious or complicated. A person in this role is responsible for the meeting process: keeping discussions moving, resolving any issues, clarifying questions, watching the time, and reinforcing careful listening. The meeting leader can then focus on completing the agenda content, achieving the meeting goals, and assuring that all participants have been heard.

Following these simple rules can help make Booster Club meetings less stressful and more productive. Good luck.

Gymnastics Operations Samples

- [Activity Sign-In Sheet](#)
- [Class Attendance Form](#)
- [Complaint Feedback Form](#)
- [Compliment Feedback Form](#)
- [Contagious Disease Exposure Notice](#)
- [Customer Service Policy](#)
- [Key / Equipment Check Out Log](#)
- [Lesson Planning Worksheet](#)
- [Maintenance Request Form](#)
- [Medical History and Waiver Form](#)
- [Meeting Sign-In Form](#)
- [Program Evaluation Survey](#)
- [Refund and Transfer Request Form](#)
- [Student Health Record](#)
- [Suggestion Form](#)
- [Telephone Log](#)

Key Points

- Participation in USA Gymnastics programs is undoubtedly the best way for a new gym owner to achieve successful operations. Using the support and materials available to USA Gymnastics Club Members is key to being an effective and efficient gym owner.
- Every gym has its own unique culture. A great culture will attract the best employees, demonstrate quality and safe operations, and appeal to customers.
- There is always room to improve operations (you don't need to be sick to get better), but truly knowing your customer and exceeding their expectations is the best customer service.
- While it is true that the emphasis should be on teaching children rather than teaching cartwheels, every gym business earns its money teaching gymnastics.
- Gymnastics has innumerable benefits for participants – socially, mentally, and physically. Instructors develop these assets in their students whenever they teach.
- The first step in being a good teacher is planning. Just like a gym owner develops a business plan, teachers must prepare a lesson plan for all of their classes.
- Class management is one of the most difficult aspects of being a gymnastics instructor. Getting the best out of students requires constant supervision and attention to positive reinforcement – regardless of the level of the athlete.
- Students also have responsibilities in participation. Students should be mentally, physically, and emotionally prepared to perform the assignments given to them.
- Parents have similar responsibilities to participate in gym programs and supporting their child while accepting the rules of the gym.



CHILD SEX ABUSE IS A SOCIETAL ISSUE, AND ALL OF US - ATHLETES, PARENTS, COACHES, ADMINISTRATORS, OFFICIALS - MUST TEAM UP AND TOGETHER WORK FOR PREVENTION.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RISK MANAGEMENT



Developing an effective and sustainable safety and risk management culture within your organization has the single greatest impact on injury reduction and lawsuit prevention. For this reason, developing a culture where safety is paramount should be a top priority for all gyms. In a strong safety-oriented culture, everyone feels responsible for the well being of the students and each other, pursuing it on a daily basis. In turn, it reduces the extent and severity of gym related injuries and illnesses, enables you to better comply with regulations and requirements, improve employee morale and productivity, keep your students safe, and reduce workers' compensation costs. Over time the norms and beliefs of the organization shift focus from eliminating hazards to proactively building systems that improve safety and risk management conditions.

Risk management has always been a key issue for the gymnastics industry to address. However, with recent events surrounding matters related to the insurance industry, risk management is now possibly the most important issue facing our industry. Everything you do involves a risk to you and your business. Gym owners must appreciate the risks involved, and manage those risks in order to ensure a successful gymnastics business.

Legal Responsibilities

The laws pertaining to voluntary participation in hazardous activities vary from state to state. Generally, the operator of a dangerous activity has a number of legal duties to provide safe environment for their participants:

- Supervise the activity closely
- Properly plan the activity
- Provide proper instruction
- Provide a safe environment
- Provide adequate and proper equipment
- Warn of inherent risks
- Provide emergency assistance
- Keep informed
- Know your students
- Keep adequate records

Everyone deals constantly with a variety of potential risks on a daily basis. Just by getting into the car to drive somewhere we face the possibility of injury to others, or ourselves, and financial loss if we break

the law speeding to our destination, or if we damage our car. Somehow, despite these and other risks, we manage to continue with our lives. Risk is not something we can avoid completely, but it is something we can manage and therefore reduce. Risk is not something we even want to eliminate, as risk makes life exciting. Hazards on the other hand must be eliminated in order to reduce the possibility of catastrophic injury. Participants involved in gymnastics activities cannot be expected to accept injuries as part of their chosen pastime, and individuals and organizations providing these opportunities must take action to prevent things going wrong.

There is an enormous amount of information available on safety, risk management, legal and insurance issues, and the task of developing a risk management plan can seem daunting. USA Gymnastics offers an exemplary risk management certification course through the USA Gymnastics University program. This course is available as a live course or may be taken online. You and your staff taking the USA Gymnastics safety course is an excellent start to developing your gym club's risk management plan. Many individuals and organizations choose to ignore reality and hope it is an issue they will never have to deal with. Unfortunately ignorance is not an excuse and this position could prove costly in the long term. Something as simple as failing to warn the participant of a risk of injury, even though the risk might be small, could be a breach of your legal duty and place your organization at risk of a negligence claim. Having and following a comprehensive risk management plan can save your business.

A risk is any exposure to potential loss or damage that can impact on your organization. Risk management is systematically identifying threats (risks) to your organization and developing policies, procedures, and practices to minimize those occurring. You are probably already practicing risk management to some degree, but it is important that you formalize what you do. Demonstrating good risk management practices has been proven to reduce the number and severity of gymnastics related injuries and may assist in reducing the number of negligence claims made.

You cannot eliminate all risks, but you can manage them appropriately. Risk management needs to become a part of the culture of your organization, rather

than being seen as something separate. The process used should be of common sense, and it should be documented.

Risks can generally be grouped under four headings:

1. Physical – injury or damage to persons or property
2. Legal – breaching legal obligations
3. Moral / Ethical – harm to your organization's reputation
4. Financial – loss of assets of the organization

Some examples of risks include:

- Insufficient qualifications of staff
- Equipment failure
- Attracting too many participants for an event
- Discrimination or harassment
- Injury to a staff member, spectator or participant
- Negative publicity
- Damage to the environment
- Loss of property

There are four main stages in risk management, namely: assessment, selection, implementation, and monitoring. A safety and risk management audit can assist you to work through these stages by following a simple process to developing a risk management plan.

Risk Assessment

After establishing your gym's mission, vision, and values to help guide you, examine everything in your operations that could result in injuries or damages (loss). Until an exposure to loss has been identified and assessed it cannot be effectively managed.

Exposure identification is a systematic process for examining the financial, property, liability, personnel, physical, and human values and identifying how those values could be impaired by an accident, and estimating consequences that such an accident would have on an organization. To be effective, gym owners must recognize that perils causing accidental loss could be as obvious as a tornado or could be more indirect such as loss of enrollments or damage to property.

Some tools for identifying loss exposures include insurance claim reports, financial documents, administrative documents, contracts and notices. Some of the most useful tools are inspection checklists and maintenance reports, incident reports and insurance data, as well as gymnastics industry information. Many of these documents can be useful in identifying the risks of your operation.

Using a checklist is an easy way to identify risks for

premises, equipment and apparatus, employment liabilities, operational risks, and give you information needed to prioritize your exposures so you can create controls for those risks. A key factor in this audit is communication to everyone in your organization so you can all be on the same risk management page. Ask for input from all of the staff on safety issues they notice, get their help in identifying what might cause a loss. Make sure all hazards are addressed (immediately removed or access controlled) as soon as they are identified.

The most common liability exposure that a gym experiences, is breach of duty or negligence. The gym owes a duty to its employees and students, which may be breached, causing an injury or damage due to the gym's actions or inaction.

To reduce this liability, gym owners should inform everyone and communicate what liabilities are likely to arise. Preparing and instituting an active program to identify and reduce loss exposures will generate benefits once everyone involved understands that the price of a lawsuit may be an alternative consequence.

Risk Control Selection

Risk control selections include avoidance, retention, and transfer. Avoidance, which is a conscious decision to avoid an activity that could incur loss, is sometimes the logical choice for controlling risk. Typical examples are prohibiting the use of the trampoline or loose foam pit during birthday parties. Restricting use is avoiding the exposure. Deciding not to conduct certain higher risk classes (e.g. adult gymnastics) is another way to avoid risk entirely. Avoidance is a risk control technique that every gym can use to some extent to reduce their liability exposure by simply choosing not to conduct a risky activity.

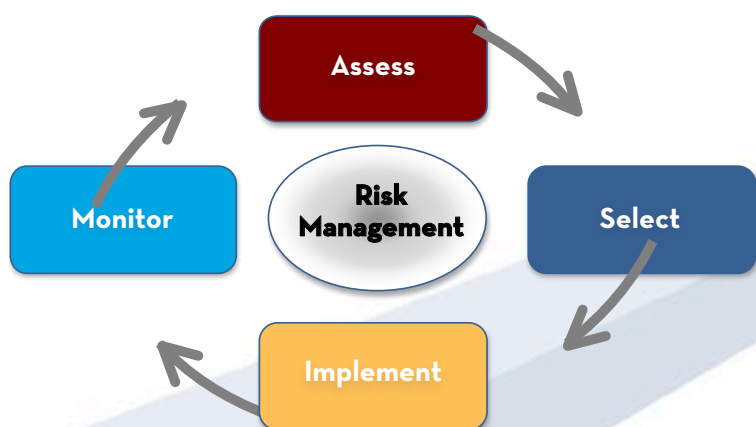
Retention is a risk control decision. Every gym retains a certain amount of loss exposure, usually through insurance policy deductibles. The higher the deductible, the higher the retention, and vice versa, the lower the insurance deductible, the lower the retention. Of course premiums may be higher with a low deductible. Work with your insurance carrier closely to determine the acceptable amount of risk you can retain, and how much you control through transfer.

Transfer of risk is handled in many ways. The most common risk transfer is insurance, where the insurance company accepts your risks in return for a premium. As stated above, the more risk a gym retains, the lower the premium, but make sure you have the financial capacity to pay deductibles and uncovered losses. Waivers and Hold Harmless Agreements are

another very common transfer of risk that if properly managed can be an extremely effective risk control. A waiver quite simply transfers the risk to the participant and (if correctly implemented) releases the gym from liability. Waivers, indemnifications, and hold harmless agreements will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Risk control selection is an important process of protecting the gym and yourself from loss. There are many options for controlling risks. Your policies manual should address all risk exposures and your policy for controlling them.

Deciding what risks to avoid, what to retain, and what to transfer is crucial to the gym owner's risk management process and avoiding injuries and lawsuits.



Risk Control Implementation

Once the gym owner has selected the desired risk control, implementation is the process of developing the procedures that best support your policy. (e.g. In your plan to reduce the risk of lost revenues, implementing a "No Refunds Policy" is easy; just don't give any refunds.). Procedures that are followed become practices. What your gym practices may be more important than your procedures in the event of a complaint. Establishing a precedent contrary to your policies and procedures may make you liable in a lawsuit. Being consistent in your implantation is important in order to avoid favoritism, bias, or discrimination.

Waivers and Hold Harmless Agreements

In the process of implementing risk controls to eliminate or reduce losses, the transfer of risk through contracts, waivers, and hold harmless indemnification agreements is an important first step. Every gym

should have specific contracts that are signed by every participant (or legal guardian), including any adults who participate in class with their child and for those who come to the facility for an event or a party.

A waiver is a is a contract between the service provider and the participant signed prior to participation by which the participant agrees to absolve the gym of any fault or liability for injuries resulting from the ordinary negligence of the gym, its employees or its agents. The agreement relieves the gym of liability for injuries resulting from mistakes, errors, or faults of the gym and, in effect, relieves the gym of the duty to use ordinary care in providing for the participant.

Some attorneys / states may use other terms such as release, disclaimer, and exculpatory agreement. These terms are usually used synonymously with waiver and while there are minor differences, they are usually referring to the same type of agreement. Another common document is the informed consent agreement. Although some erroneously use it instead of a waiver, the informed consent is a different type of agreement. It is used to protect the provider from liability for the informed treatment risks of a treatment or program to which the individual agrees to be subjected (e.g., medical treatment, therapy, experiment, training program). In general, they are used when something is "done to" the individual. These are used in medicine and research and have recently been used by personal trainers.

Waivers do not always work, and laws differ in most states. Waivers often fail due to common factors:

- When the service is an essential service or of public interest (e.g., medical care, electric or water service);
- When one party has superior bargaining power over the other (e.g., teacher-student, employer-employee);
- When the conduct is beyond ordinary negligence (e.g., gross negligence, reckless conduct, intentional acts);
- When the waiver is to relieve one of a statutory (legal) duty;
- When the waiver is not clear and unambiguous in its intent; or
- When fraud or misrepresentation is involved.

In any state, a waiver can fail for a number of reasons. A few of these reasons are explained below:

- **Language Requirements.** The most common reason that waivers fail is because they are poorly written. A key guideline required in all

states is that the waiver language be clear and unambiguous. If the waiver does not clearly specify the intent of the parties to release the provider from liability for negligence, the court will not enforce the waiver. Note, however, that what is considered clear and unambiguous varies from state to state. For instance, some states require the waiver to state that the signer is releasing the provider from “negligence” and must include the word “negligence.” Courts in other states do not require, but strongly encourage the inclusion of the term. Still other states simply say that as long as the intent is clear, the specific language is unimportant and accept such language as “release from any and all claims.” Always check with your attorney for proper language in your area.

- **Extreme Acts.** Courts in most states enforce waivers of liability only for “ordinary negligence.” Courts in these states hold that enforcement of a waiver when the action resulting in the injury was gross negligence, reckless conduct, willful / wanton conduct, or an intentional act is against public policy.
- **Unequal Bargaining Power.** Waivers are not generally enforced if one of the parties has a clearly dominant bargaining position. Examples would include a coach requiring a waiver of his athletes, a teacher and a student, and an employer and an employee. Courts generally hold that recreation and sport waivers do not involve a clearly dominant position. Courts generally hold that such activities are optional, the participant does not have to participate, the participant can participate in another activity, and the participant can go to another provider – hence, there is no advantage in bargaining position for the provider.
- **Conspicuous Language.** Most courts feel that it is important that the waiver language be obvious to the signer. Preferably the waiver should be on a sheet to itself. This removes the argument that the signer did not know what he or she was signing. On the other hand if the waiver is included in the middle of the membership contract or on an entry form containing other information, the signer is apt to claim he or she failed to realize that he or she signed away important legal rights. This problem is compounded when the waiver section of these documents is not highlighted and set off in some way. Emphasizing the waiver



section by using larger print size, a subheading, bold print, or placing it in a box would help. Having the participant initial key points in the waiver is also helpful. Failure to do this can result in an unenforceable waiver.

- **Inherent Risks.** Waivers sometimes fail for failure to list the inherent risks of the activity. This is crucial for gymnastics activities. Courts in some states now require that the inherent risks of the activity be listed. This actually works to the advantage of the provider because including the inherent risks in a waiver provides evidence that the signer was aware of the inherent risks of the activity and assumed those risks. One caution – keep all discussion related to the inherent risks separate so that the signer will not confuse inherent risk with the negligence risks.

There are many other factors that can cause a waiver to fail – too many to address in this section, but gym owners should remember that waivers can protect in most states and it is worth the effort to develop a good waiver and use it for protection.

A typical concern for gymnastics professionals is the validity of a waiver signed by a parent or guardian for a child. There is no downside to using a waiver with a minor client. Have a parent (preferably both) sign the waiver. If it is not upheld, it still helps with a primary assumption of risk defense.

Waivers are the best single risk management tools available to gym owners other than the prevention of the injury. Though it is often difficult to understand, waivers can protect the gym from liability even when the gym is negligent. Waivers are often used in motions for summary judgment that may reject a lawsuit. A few key points to remember include:

- Use waivers, hold harmless and indemnification agreements. They may help establish a primary assumption of risk defense.
- There is a sample waiver included in the Appendix that may be used as a template. The waiver should be re-written and designed specifically for your gym and your program. Use legal counsel for confirmation the waiver language is enforceable.
- Store your signed waivers in a safe place and keep them for years – how many depends on the statute of limitations in your state.

New Student Risks

With new registrations come all sorts of expectations and pre-conceptions. Gym owners must make sure these expectations are realistic. Make sure parents are aware of, and appreciate, the inherent risk of the sport. Collect the registration forms, indemnifications, medical treatment release, hold harmless, medical history / participation readiness information you need AND conduct a brief personal orientation. You can do this as a group or individually, but take the time to give a face-to-face spiel on the risks and responsibilities of participation. Do not give the impression that gymnastics isn't dangerous or that injuries won't occur. Warn the students and the parents of the dangers before the first class! Yes, really.

Let your parents and athletes know that they can get hurt and specifically what injuries can happen. In the event of an injury and lawsuit, a plaintiff can claim they didn't know that gymnastics was dangerous. Educate your clients, especially the new ones. Let them know that what they saw on TV is not all there is to gymnastics. Let them make an informed decision about whether or not to join your club.

Make sure your warnings and waivers can help protect you from lawsuits. In most states, waivers can protect a facility and its personnel — provided the waiver is well written and properly administered. Problems can arise from poor wording in waivers, or administration of the waiver. All waivers must meet the standard of being clear and unambiguous, and the most frequent reason for failure is that the waiver was confusing and poorly written. Keep waivers crystal clear to protect you from lawsuits.

Waivers should include an integration clause that states, "... agrees that no oral representations, statements or inducement apart from the foregoing written agreement have been made." Each state has certain requirements and restrictions, but there are key pieces to effective waivers. Find a local attorney that has experience with indemnification / hold harmless agreements and is familiar with the sport.

If your gym does not require a new waiver for each new class or session, include a specified duration as "forever," and spell out something like "... expressly agrees that Gym shall not be liable for any damages arising from personal injuries sustained by the participant ... on or about the premises of the said gymnasium or as a result of their using the facilities and the equipment therein. ... Participant or participant's guardian accepts full responsibility of any such injuries or damages which may occur to the

participant ... on or about the premises. ... Participant or participant's guardian assumes full responsibility for any injuries, damages or losses which may occur to Participant... and forever release and discharge Gym and all associated gymnasiums, their owners, employees and agents from any and all claims [and/or] damages."

Be sure the language informs readers that they are solely responsible for injuries incurred and that they waive the defendant's liability by relinquishing the right to sue, and contains words such as "waiver," "disclaim," "release," or similar words that would clearly indicate the intent of the document.

Poorly prepared agreements can produce a false sense of security. Be certain that your waiver is effective. Do not copy someone else's waiver. You might be tempted to use the waiver language presented above. This waiver language was enforced in Michigan (a state with lenient requirements for the enforcement of waivers), but would not be enforced by courts in many states because it does not refer specifically to the "negligence of the Gym." There is a legal science involved in drafting an ironclad waiver. Use your insurance carrier and an attorney to vet the document you use. Check and update the waiver often.

Take special care with your new students to make sure they turn into old students. Best practice is to start by letting them know what to expect from gymnastics.

Insurance

Insurance is the most common method of risk transfer. Gym owners should purchase insurance coverage from an A. M. Best rated company. A new standard is evolving with \$2 million general liability coverage rather than the old standard of \$1 million of protection. The \$1 million dollar amount was established in the 1970s, and we all know that \$1 million just doesn't pay for what it used to. Gym owners must budget for annual insurance premiums and avoid gaps in coverage with expired insurance. Make sure there is cash available to cover the deductible for whatever policy you carry. Athletes are insured during participation in events sanctioned by USA Gymnastics.

Owners must read and understand their liability, property, and professional insurance policies. Beware of exemptions and exclusions written into many policies. If you conduct birthday parties, adult classes, or open gyms or other programs such as dance, karate, camps, circus, parkour etc., make sure they are covered in your liability policy. Competitive programs that require travel as part of the gym may need auto insurance to protect

the coaches and athletes. If you own the facility, be certain you have sufficient property coverage to replace the building and equipment. Comply with all workers' compensation insurance requirements for your state.

A common oversight by gym owners that rent or lease out their facilities to other groups or individuals, is the lack of additional insured certificates from these groups. Another risk transfer best practice is to require any independent users of the equipment or gym to provide a certificate of insurance naming the gym as additional insured. This makes the renter/contractor's insurance the primary coverage in the event of a lawsuit, rather than the gym owners.

Employment-Practices Liability Insurance

For a premium comparatively nominal to the cost of litigation, employers can purchase an employment-practices liability insurance policy (EPLI). An EPLI policy provides protection for the employer from the economic and noneconomic losses resulting from employment-related claims, including but not limited to claims of wrongful termination, discrimination, harassment or retaliation.

As part of a gym's safety program portfolio, an employer's overall risk management should include an EPLI policy to protect them from the costly litigation associated with labor and employment. Small-business owners with a few employees can purchase an EPLI policy to protect themselves from the cost of litigation that could reach hundreds of thousands of dollars and financially devastate an organization.

In summary, the steps to develop a risk management plan are:

1. Make a commitment as an organization to risk management.
2. Identify all hazards and possible risks.
3. Assess the level of each risk.
4. Decide to accept or manage each risk.
5. Formalize your risk management action plan.
6. Implement your risk management options.
7. Communicate information to everyone affected.
8. Review your risk management action plan on a regular basis.
9. Identify any new risks and update your plan

Audits are useful tools as a starting point to identify risks. However they are not definitive, as each organization will have issues that are specific to them that must be considered. An example of the sorts of questions you might find in an audit include:

- Does your Board or staff meet regularly, with all decisions and actions documented?
- Is the annual report or meeting minutes circulated to all members?
- Are all of your financial transactions accurately recorded?
- Does the organization have the following insurance coverage – public liability, property owner or renter's insurance, auto coverage, abuse or molestation protection, professional indemnity and director's and officer's liability, and workers compensation?
- Are your rules, by-laws and practices non-discriminatory?
- Do you have a clear plan for the future that describes what you want to do and how you are going to do it?
- Have you considered the health and safety of everyone in the organization and do you meet OSHA regulations?
- Do all coaches/instructors/leaders have appropriate, current accreditation and certifications?
- Does staff receive regular ongoing training to keep up to date on gymnastics standards?
- Do you conduct risk assessments on all programs, activities and events?
- Is there a clear procedure for reporting incidents?

In Depth

Gym owners face a multitude of risks. Gymnastics has many inherent risks (e.g. falling and incurring injury), and every business faces loss exposures (i.e. financial losses, employment issues, etc.). Managing all of those risks is a constant concern for a gym owner. Avoiding damages and loss is an ongoing process that includes a complete audit and analysis to create a risk management plan.

USA Gymnastics University Safety and Risk Management Certification

USA Gymnastics University offers the (U101) Safety and Risk Management certification courses that are continually updated and are available online or as part of a live workshop. The primary goal of this course is to increase safety awareness. The course has been designed for a variety of audiences gymnastics coaches, teachers, instructors, club owners, meet directors, judges, athletes and others. The course covers risk management; environmental, program and legal factors; sports injury care and special gymnastics safety factors. The course addresses the two basic areas of risk in gymnastics – risk of injury, which is the primary risk, and risk of a lawsuit. Safety Certification helps better prepare the gymnastics professional to be more vigilant and more likely to foresee potential problems. Certification appears to reduce the incidence of catastrophic injuries and enhances professionalism. Use the USA Gymnastics University website at www.usagym.org/education to register for an online course or find a live workshop near you.

Administration Operations Risk

With all of the risk gym owners manage every day, it is easy to understand how the office may be overlooked when it comes to safety and risk management. Just because the copy machine isn't directly a hazardous piece of equipment and most paper cuts don't require OSHA reporting, doesn't mean office safety can be ignored. Gym owners need to develop policies and procedures and a safety and emergency action plan.

Normal financial risks cannot be overlooked. Daily accounting procedures, cash handling, credit card and check processing, petty cash, and security all need consideration, just as in any business. If the gym has a safe, protocols for who has access must be established. Purchasing policies for goods and materials bought for the gym should require receipts for reimbursement. Security procedures for travel to and from your bank are important for the safety of the staff making deposits. Staff should also be instructed in what to do in the unlikely event of a robbery. Occasional audits of financial operations will help identify any discrepancies and shrinkage that can occur when dealing with money.

Gym owners need to recognize the office area as another risk exposure for their business. A few simple best practices can insure your gym remains safe and incident-free. Establishing a comprehensive safety plan with employee commitment and involvement can greatly decrease the likelihood of an accident at work. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration

(OSHA) offers a variety safety tips online, but with a little time, coupled with common sense, you can create a workplace safety plan.

Piles of papers and cords and wires can combine to create a fire hazard. Removing unnecessary debris from work areas can go a long way in preventing problems. It sounds simple, but keeping everything in its place is a top safety tip. Cleaning materials and paint improperly stored can be very dangerous in the event of a fire and must be kept locked up away from children at all times. Keep closets and cabinets organized and clean.

Make sure locks are working properly, window latches are all operational and plugs and outlets are all properly connected. Your fire alarm and fire extinguisher should also be checked monthly and tested annually. Make sure that fully stocked first aid kits are accessible and visible and exits clearly marked. You should keep ice on hand as well. Damp sponges kept frozen with double zip lock bags are a convenient way to accomplish this.

Make sure office staff have the tools to do their job safely. Ergonomics cannot be overlooked. Be certain that workspaces are properly efficient, and not harmful. All employees, but office workers in particular must be trained on harassment and workplace violence. Best practice is upon hiring and then no less than an annual training. Staff must be prepared for all risk exposures.

When an emergency occurs, your employees must know what to do. Of course, they are responsible adults. But, unless you've specifically outlined an emergency plan don't be too certain they know where to go. Your employees should know where to congregate in the event it's necessary to clear the work area. Otherwise chaos can ensue. For example, one employee doesn't see another and fears they are still in the building and re-enters in the hope of rescuing the person. Instead they are injured while searching for their missing co-worker – who was at lunch the entire time. Furthermore, staff should know which emergency exits to use in the event of an evacuation, and one staff member should be left behind to do a sweep of bathrooms or locker facilities to ensure no one is left behind. Additionally, have an offsite staging location where you will walk the children in the event of an emergency such as a fire. Another nearby business or a school is an excellent choice. Make sure the business or school knows that they are part of your evacuation plan and offer to be their place of evacuation in return.

Have a meeting outlining your gym's emergency action plan and conduct a fire / evacuation drill. A few minutes of planning can make a world of difference. The plan

itself is a basic foundation. It's only as good as the people who know about it and utilize it. Re-training should be conducted any time there is staff turnover on at least a semi-annual basis. Almost every office can benefit from regular safety assessments. Have a plan!

Facility Considerations

Since you don't get a second chance to make a good first impression, it is imperative to keep the facility clean and attractive at all times. It is everyone's responsibility to pitch in to keep the entire gym clean and be picked it up immediately. If staff notices litter outside on their way in to work, have them bring it in and place it in the trash. A facility should be equipped with the best equipment and apparatus available. Constantly being re-supplied with new equipment and mats, the gymnastics center must be cleaned daily. There is an axiom that states a customer won't come to your business just because the bathrooms are clean, but if the bathrooms aren't clean a customer just won't come to your business. Much has been written about facility and equipment specifications and recommendations in regard to safety. The USA Gymnastics Safety Manual remains one of the best resources available; it is highly recommended that all Gymnastics Professionals read and follow this comprehensive safety and risk management guide as it relates to facilities and apparatus.

Create and administrate a regular cleaning schedule. Keep staff busy whenever they are not performing regularly assigned duties by going through a checklist of additional special duties to ensure a safe, clean and attractive gym. Don't forget all of the props that the littlest gymnasts use. Those need to be disinfected regularly, and plush toys should be washed at least monthly. This creates the image of a clean and safe environment that is key to customer confidence. The collateral advantages include an active and busy employee and increased and improved maintenance of the facility.

Opening and Closing Procedures

It is important that specific procedures be established regarding the proper opening and closing of the facility. Ensure that staff knows how to lock all doors and windows, etc., where the electrical and gas utility shut offs are, how any alarms are operated, and who to call in the event of a problem. Simply because of the nature of our activities, if a gym is not secure, substantial liability can result in the event of an injury, even to a trespasser.

Other facility related issues to be aware of include:

- Parking areas
- Entrances and exits
- Restrooms and Locker areas
- Landscaping
- Indoor and outdoor lighting
- Ventilation (circulation, heating and cooling)
- Delivery areas/loading docks
- Sidewalks and walkways
- Landscaping
- Snow and ice removal
- General exterior maintenance
- Signage and notices

Do not allow hazards to remain. If there is a dangerous situation that requires immediate attention and correction, get it done.

Equipment Considerations

Regular maintenance and periodic inspections coupled with a solid program of repair and replacement is imperative to an effective risk management program. Much has been written about facility and equipment specifications and recommendations in regard to safety. The USA Gymnastics Safety Manual remains one of the best resources available; it is highly recommended that all gymnastics professionals read and follow this comprehensive safety and risk management guide as it relates to facilities, equipment and apparatus. A very effective way to manage risk as it pertains to equipment and apparatus is to understand that even "heavy duty" gymnastics equipment has a life expectancy and will not last forever.

Mats wear out and become unstably soft or lose their uniformity; metal can experience stress and fatigue and will eventually expire; wood and wood laminate is subject to environmental factors such as humidity and ultraviolet light and will wear out.

Have a program of replacing equipment on an amortized scheduled basis. Having new and state-of-the-art equipment does not eliminate risk but can substantially reduce the possibility of apparatus failure and the hazards associated with old, worn equipment.

An effective way to prepare and plan for equipment replacement is to conduct an extensive equipment audit that focuses on the date of purchase and life expectancy of every piece of apparatus and mat in the gym. This audit needs to take place just one time, but will need to be updated and maintained as new (or used) equipment is purchased or brought into use.

Equipment Maintenance

Even the gym owner that follows every best practice will be forced to face unexpected challenges. Inevitably, problems will occur — customers will complain, the economy will cycle, coaches will need more training and equipment will need repair or replacement. In regard to apparatus, however, gym owners can prepare for some unpredictability by instituting a preventive maintenance strategy. A proactive inspection plan can be used to prolong the gym equipment's useful lifespan and reduce the susceptibility of situations that could lead to accident, injury or lawsuit. Any extra attention given to repairing loose parts, worn pieces, "dead" mats or torn carpeting can not only counteract the negative stigma resulting from shabby equipment, it can also help reduce the incidence of preventable injuries to athletes.

Keeping mats and apparatus in "like new" condition can be an involved but worthwhile process. The goal is to beat the equipment's depreciation curve, and preventive maintenance helps that goal be reached: Adding just one year to a piece of equipment's life expectancy can reduce depreciation costs by as much as 23 percent. There are four main areas to consider when creating a maintenance plan for gymnastics equipment: layout, physical condition, aesthetic, and record keeping.

- **Layout.** There is almost always room for improvement when it comes to the way a gym is configured. The lay out of a gym can be part of a facility's equipment maintenance plan. The person responsible for the regular inspection / maintenance of the equipment should take into consideration the location of the apparatus in relation to other pieces of equipment and to traffic patterns in the gym. If there is a risk of an athlete hitting another piece of equipment while performing an assigned task, the equipment is too close together for that assignment. This risk of hitting another apparatus must be weighed according to the possibility of falls and flying into other equipment. This also holds true with respect to traffic patterns and the risk of hitting other students (or spectators) while using the apparatus. This is often a hazard when restrooms or water fountains are located near heavily used equipment or when students moving from one event to another cross paths too closely to students working on a swinging apparatus or crossing tumbling or vaulting



runways. The solution is obviously to move the equipment or redirect traffic patterns. The person making the inspections could be assigned to make recommendations to relocate equipment or revise rotations to ensure a safe layout of the gym equipment.

- **Physical Condition.** Probably the most obvious issue of concern is the mechanical condition of the equipment. Regular inspections as well as the daily recognition of safety issues are critical. On gymnastics equipment, all bolts, welds, cables, springs, bearings, rails, couplers, hardware and pulleys should be inspected to ensure safety and functionality. Bolts should be checked for tightness and rust, and welds should be solid without any chips or cracking. Cables and belts should be taut and unworn, while bearings and pulleys should function smoothly. Bars and rails should not be cracked or chipped. Manufacturer recommendations should always be consulted. If it is determined, after inspection, that one or more components of a piece of apparatus are not working properly or needs adjustment, those components should be fixed immediately. If a piece of equipment cannot be repaired by gym staff, place a "KEEP OFF" sign on it or remove it from use until it can be repaired, preferably by a professional. In many cases equipment dealers and distributors will provide trained repair professionals who can make on-site calls. Or, if the equipment was bought new or used directly from the manufacturer, the manufacturer should be contacted to see if it has a list of local persons or businesses authorized to do the repair work without voiding the original warranty. Most manufacturers offer inspection guidelines; if so, follow those recommendations. At busier programs, it may be best to address inspection and maintenance tasks before or after normal business hours, since many gyms don't have the personnel necessary to simultaneously conduct classes and perform exhaustive equipment maintenance. When checking equipment, always make sure that its operation meets not only your own standards, but also those set forth in the manufacturer's preventive maintenance guidelines or owner's manual. Adhering to such standards will likely ensure that equipment lasts longer and remains covered by any original equipment manufacturer warranties. Be sure to go beyond the obvious; it is not enough to simply check the cables on the bars and the spin locks on the beams. Truly inspect the floor connections on the bars. Climb up

and take a close look at the ring rig and the ceiling clamps on the overhead spotting system; empty the pit and check for sharp protrusions or cracked walls. Before any maintenance or repair work can be done, gym owners need to be equipped with the right tools. Generally, most of the necessary tools are listed in the manufacturer's user / owner's manual. A typical list might include a file, a hammer, a pliers set, screwdrivers, an Allen wrench set, a crescent wrench, a mallet, tape (masking, duct, transparent and electrical), a drill and bit set, and a socket wrench set. A staple gun and touch-up paint in the equipment's color may also be beneficial as well as upholstery repair supplies. These supplies should be located in an easy-to-find and well-organized toolbox or cabinet.

- **Aesthetic.** The appearance of a piece of equipment should also be considered when doing regular maintenance. This can include checking upholstery for excess wear or tears, or painting chipped equipment — but mostly, it means cleaning. Cleanliness is often the first thing patrons notice about a gym, and as simple and critical as the task may seem, cleaning can easily be given short shrift by a busy staff. As with mechanical repairs, there are certain materials needed to keep equipment clean, including sponges, rags or towels, and various types of cleaning solutions. Some basic types of cleaning solutions that you may need are a degreaser, a disinfectant, a deodorizer, a fungicide, a general cleaner and a sanitizer (particularly for cleanups involving bodily fluids). This may seem to be a long list, but some products can perform several jobs at once. Mats should be checked for wear and cleaned often. If a beam cover needs to be replaced, it may need to be stapled, pressed or sewn on. If the cover needs to be stapled, it can usually be changed fairly easily with a staple gun, a screwdriver and new upholstery. Pressed covers, however, may need to be professionally replaced. To clean mats or carpet, always refer to manufacturer guidelines for approved cleaning solutions. Sometimes, the metal on equipment frames can attract attention — and dirt. For these surfaces, particularly those near the floor, a general-purpose degreaser is often recommended. Such a solution will not only remove chalk dust, grime, and dirt quickly and easily from virtually any type of metal, it will also leave an attractive, shiny finish. Regardless of the type of spray being used or whether it is being used for upholstery, plastic or metal, it is best to spray the solution directly on the surface, and then wait a few minutes before wiping it off. This will give the cleaning solution a chance to loosen the debris from the surface being cleaned, and allow for easier removal of any dust

or dirt. More extensive steps need to be taken to clean surfaces covered with blood. Bodily fluids introduce the risk of communicable diseases such as hepatitis B spreading to gymnasts and staff. Whenever blood gets onto a piece of equipment, it should be handled carefully and quickly. Disposable protective gloves should be worn. All blood should be carefully removed from contaminated surfaces with a clean towel or mop. After the blood is removed, a sanitizing solution should be used according to the manufacturer's instructions. When the cleanup is finished, all personal safety items (such as the gloves), the towel and mop head should be treated as a biohazard and disposed of in a plastic garbage bag.

- **Record Keeping.** There are a number of risk management concerns when conducting a gym's equipment maintenance plan. Gym owners need to have an easy way to keep track of who is cleaning and inspecting the equipment and have a record of the work performed. Perhaps the easiest method is to use a clipboard and binders, with different binders representing different tasks. For example, one binder can represent daily cleaning, while another can include weekly or monthly tasks, such as inspections and maintenance. Each piece of equipment can be listed in an Equipment Checklist. With this method, a simple chart of what needs to be done (and when) can be made, with each piece of equipment listed in a vertical column, and individual dates in horizontal rows. Once a task is complete, a coach can simply initial the proper box. Owners may wish to rotate the inspection duties amongst staff in order to gain different perspectives on the need for repairs. Every repair — from changing a cable tensioner to having a reflex beam professionally serviced — should be recorded in a repair log. Details such as purchase dates, purchase price, warranty lengths and manufacturer phone numbers could also be included. With this information, a gym owner could easily find out almost anything about any piece of equipment in his or her facility. (This would also be possible using a notebook or simple chart, although a detailed information search would be more troublesome.) Keeping such detailed records will not only benefit the gym in terms of organization, but it might provide a level of defensibility in the event of a lawsuit.

Even if all these steps to prolong the life of equipment are followed, mats and apparatus will still eventually wear out and need to be replaced. Obviously, it will only benefit a gym owner's bottom line if they can reduce the frequency at which he or she has to replace or make major repairs to equipment. Preventive maintenance

plans can play a significant role in the efforts to stave off these inevitable expenses.

To save money some clubs or coaches will make their own equipment either from scratch (i.e. PVC pipe parallel bars or bannister rail pirouette bar) or by modifying an existing piece of equipment (e.g. adding tennis balls to the springs of a vaulting board). Think very carefully before doing so. If an athlete should become injured because the equipment fails, you could be liable for the faulty piece of equipment with no comparative negligence to an established equipment manufacturer.

MRSA

MRSA, which stands for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus is a type of staph bacteria that is normally found on the skin (armpit, groin, and genital areas) and in the nose. However, even though it is on the skin, it does not normally cause an illness. When this staph bacterium enters the body through a break in the skin, it can cause an infection that looks like a pimple, boil or even a spider bite. It can also cause serious infections such as blood stream infections or pneumonia. Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is resistant to antibiotics such as methicillin and other antibiotics linked to penicillin. Anyone can be at risk for MRSA but some more than others. These individuals include recent antibiotic recipients, people participating in contact sports, children, individuals with a suppressed immune system, as well as people who share personal items.

In order to prevent MRSA:

- Practice good hand hygiene by washing hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (the sanitizer should maintain skin contact for at least 15 seconds and hand washing should last at a minimum of 15 seconds). You may want to consider placing hand sanitizer dispensers in and around the gym.
 - Take a shower with hot water and wash with soap (liquid antibacterial soap, not bar soap) following all activities.
 - Avoid sharing personal items (i.e. razors, and soap).
 - Use a barrier like a towel between your skin and shared equipment.
 - Wipe surfaces of equipment before and after use.
 - Clean and properly cover any open wounds like abrasions and lacerations with a suitable bandage at all times.
- Maintain clean facilities and equipment.
 - Have gymnasts wear shoes or flip flops between events.
 - Do not ignore skin infections, pimples, pustules, abscesses, and report these to an Athletic Trainer, Coach, and/or physician immediately.
 - Do not be afraid to contact a doctor if you do have a skin infection and you suspect you may have MRSA.

The first and most cost effective suggestion on how to clean your gym is to use a 1 to 10 ratio of bleach to water solution for hard surfaces such as mats, medicine balls, therapy balls, and water fountains. Isopropyl alcohol and Hibiclens (an antibacterial solution) are other options, but are more difficult to use on a large area.

Be sure and check with the manufacturer on what cleaning products are safe for their specific equipment. If a bleach solution is not safe to use on a surface, most antibacterial disinfectant cleaners will work. Make sure to read the label or go to the product's website for more information on what bacteria the cleaner kills.

There are also disinfectant sprays that do not have all the harmful chemicals that other products have. For instance, Sol-U-Guard Botanical does not use chemicals in their product. They only use natural germ busting plants to eliminate bacteria.

There is no easy way to clean porous surfaces such as the gymnastic floor, foam pits, and the vault runway. A light coat of disinfectant spray can help kill some of the bacteria on the surface of these pieces of equipment. However, the best thing to do to prevent MRSA is to wash your hands during competition or practice and shower immediately afterwards.

In the gymnastic setting it can be hard to clean every item that athletes touch, but here are some tips that can guide you:

1. When you are cleaning wear gloves to avoid getting yourself infected.
2. Clean common areas where people gather daily.
3. Items that athletes come in contact with multiple times like drinking fountains or doors need to be cleaned daily.
4. Clean chalk holders weekly.
5. Clean the showers and locker rooms daily.
6. If the facility has showering area make sure towels are properly sanitized (hot water and added bleach).

Participant Considerations

The laws pertaining to participation in hazardous activities vary from state to state, but some responsibilities are universal. There are inherent risks involved in the participation in gymnastics activities; participants MUST be made aware of these risks. Participants have the right to not be exposed to hazardous conditions; the operator of a dangerous activity has the legal duty to provide a safe environment for their participants.

Generally, a participant accepts responsibility for their involvement in a dangerous activity by agreeing to accept responsibility and acknowledging that they are aware of the risks of their participation; this is typically done through consent forms and waivers. Gymnastics professionals need to understand that they have a very serious responsibility to protect their clientele, but lawsuits filed by the participants can occur even if every precaution is taken.

All participants (and their parent/guardian) should be informed of, and required to acknowledge the risks of participation, and agree to abide by the rules of participation by signing a consent form. Participants should also agree to allow medical treatment if it becomes necessary by signing a medical release form. Participants should acknowledge their readiness / preparedness to engage in gymnastics activities by completing and signing a medical history survey.

Gymnastics professionals must understand that a participant is least at risk when they are fully prepared to perform the skill being asked of them. A participant should be mentally ready to perform by fully understanding the skill and cognitively aware of what is expected. A participant must also be physically ready to perform by being strong enough, flexible enough, powerful enough, fast enough and generally physically able to perform the skill. The participant must also be emotionally ready to perform by being prepared on a psychological level – not overly confident, not overly fearful and focused on the task. A gymnast that is mentally and physically able to accomplish the skill and has the emotional foundation to perform will be concentrating on the task and typically tries harder. This ultimately leads to a greater chance of successfully completing the skill and therefore less likely at risk of failure and injury.

Accident Prevention

The best way to handle an emergency is to avoid one. Accident prevention is a never-ending priority in the gymnastics. You need to be aware of everything that

is going on around you. If you see an unsafe situation, you have the responsibility to correct it. If you observe another teacher that may need a little “help” please be considerate of their feelings and treat them like the professional that they are. Talk to your co-worker privately if you have a suggestion. Never criticize or complain in front of a class.

1. **KEEP YOUR STUDENTS IN LINE** – Use hoops, carpet squares, ropes, ladders, etc. to help keep the littler kids in order. Tell them exactly where you want them to go. Whenever groups are in the hallway, they are to be kept in line, quiet and absolutely not running. Leaders should be in close proximity of the line or group and children must always be within staff’s field of vision.
2. **USE LOTS OF CHOICES** – Keep the children busy by setting up extra activity stations. Set up the stations so that there is no confusion as to where to go. Make it perfectly clear what you want them to work on. Do not leave any question as to what you want to see. If your activities take too long or the workout moves too slowly, the kids will get bored and tend to wander. Keep the activities moving!
3. **EQUIPMENT** – Excess equipment should be stored in its proper place. Keep sharp objects as far from working areas as possible. Stored equipment should not be stacked too high and do not allow your students to climb over/under/through/around stacked materials.
4. **ROTATIONS** – Moving from place to place is often our biggest problem. Do not let your class “break” and run through the gym to get a drink or move to the next event. Move your class together in a straight line, teaching them the importance of watching out for the other groups. Be particularly aware of public areas.
5. **KEEP IT CALM** – Discipline is one of our objectives. Teach your students to use “inside voices” and explain to them “personal space”. Refrain from raising your own voice and you will probably see your kids staying quieter. Do not yell across the room. It is sometimes necessary to stop your class if things get crazy and out of hand. Have everyone sit down and relax a bit to change the mood and energy level. Change activities or use the time for a little group instruction. Stay in control of your class.
6. **SUPERVISION** – Never leave a child unattended. Children should always be under the direct supervision (in the field of vision!) of the teachers at all times. Never leave your group unless you have made sure another teacher is aware that

you are going and that the children have proper supervision. This supervision includes children using the restrooms, going for a drink of water, etc. For children who are old enough, they are allowed to go to the bathroom with another child who is also old enough without being supervised by a teacher. (However, older children cannot escort a much younger child to the bathroom.)

Specific Safety Concerns

Obstacle Courses / Floor Areas

- Close spaces between mats – no gaps
- Make sure all potential hazard areas are matted / padded
- Use caution when using carpet squares or other placeholders as markers, they may be slippery
- Place wedges short end or tall end against each other so children do not crash into ends or leave space
- When using cylinders, octagons, and barrels make sure mats are snug against them to keep them secure
- If using an A frame type ladder, place a barrel mat under it (the barrel acts as a safety net)
- Make sure hard objects are removed from the bottom of wedge; in other words, don't have children roll down a wedge and into a ladder or vaulting board
- Make sure traffic patterns are clear and everyone is going the same direction
- A foam handle water ski rope is a very safe trapeze; wooden, metal, and plastic dowels are very slippery even when wrapped with tape
- Remember an even landing area for all landing areas
- Have a safe way down on all sides of high mats
- When using ladders or planks be sure to have about 6" of them on the mat you're using to support them
- If using a plank as a slide it is helpful to have a lip on the underside, that way it doesn't slide off
- Make sure to have an inner and outer "ledge" on obstacles the children drop through
- Landing from the trapeze into an octagon can be fun, but remember to spot the landing
- Remember to leave pathways between the lines of equipment in the course
- Mats not in use should be safely stacked and out of the way of children

- Equipment such as ladders not in use are attractive nuisances (if a child can see it they will want to use it) and must be stored away or properly secured
- Clean up body fluids immediately – yes, even from the carpet!

Gymnasiums / Gross Motor Development Areas

- If on a wooden, tile, or concrete floor, make sure it is dry (no baby spit-up)
- Clean up any body fluids immediately, both off from equipment and floor (Slips are very dangerous)
- When using parachute be careful if lifting parachute and allowing it to float onto children's heads, sometimes it knocks them down
- During parachute rides even though the children love to surf, remind them that it hurts when landing on a bottom—even one with a thick diaper!
- During parachute rides, avoid sudden starts and stops
- Socks and footed tights are slippery on floors as well as on equipment

Vault Areas

- Always remember to check all spin locks
- Be sure to close all gaps between mats
- Make sure all potential hazard areas are matted / padded
- Gaps between springboards and mats should not occur
- The vault table should be low enough for the children to jump only about chest high down
- If using a wedge at the vault table, make sure it is snugly placed against the table
- Do not allow gymnasts to raise and lower the vault for one another without checking the adjustment.

Bars Areas

- Always remember to check all spin locks
- Make sure ALL landing surfaces are well padded
- Make sure all potential hazard areas are matted / padded (cable tighteners)
- Bars should be low enough that children are only about 1" from the floor with body fully extended and toes pointed (chest high)
- Metal bars are a better circumference for toddler hands
- Make sure straps on rings, etc. hanging from bars are in good condition

- Make sure rope ladder bridges suspended from parallel bars are very snug and the children have easy access to them (make sure boxes are stacked both securely and high enough). The parallel bars should also be the same height on both sides and low enough to act as rails for the children.
- Cargo nets and rope ladders suspended from bars should be snug and not easily tripped over

Beam Areas

- Always remember to check all spin locks
- Make sure all potential hazard areas are matted / padded (beam legs and supports)
- Landing areas from beams should be well padded and free of any clutter
- Beams should either be lowered or have mats stacked below them so they are no higher than chest level
- Provide for safe mounting and dismounting
- Remember the safest place to spot a preschooler on beam is at their waist (their center of gravity); do not hold their hand as you can inadvertently cause “nurse maid’s elbow” if they should fall.

Foam Block Pits

- Watch for little ones burying themselves and hiding in the Pit
- Reinforce proper landing techniques DAILY for students in language that they understand
- Educate parents to remove children from the pit by lifting them under the armpits

Trampolines / Tumbl Traks

- Beware of children crawling under the apparatus.
- Watch out for equipment stored underneath that might be hit during bouncing. (Better yet, do not allow any equipment to be stored beneath the Tumble Trak)
- Be aware of the inherent risks of the Tumble Trak, which are similar to those of a trampoline.
- A student can bounce off of the Tumble Trak and onto the floor at any time and improper landings on the Tumble Trak bed itself can cause injury.
- There should be ample distance between each bouncer to avoid a collision or dynamic “double bouncing.”
- There should be a spotter at the end of the Tumble Trak whenever necessary.
- Students should be reminded regularly of the risks of using the Tumble Trak.

- Skills should only be performed onto proper landing mats
- Make sure all potential hazard areas are matted / padded
- Make sure all springs are covered and properly matted
- Never allow unsupervised use on this equipment
- Do not allow toys on the equipment
- Provide for safe mounting and dismounting
- Train spotters so that no child falls off the apparatus

A Few Suggestions

- Set up the gym – Obstacles Courses, Stations, Rotations, Activities, etc. based on the “lowest common denominator” class and have the instructors adjust the set up to accommodate their class, returning the set-up to this lowest common denominator.
- Beware of unsupervised babies crawling through, around, anywhere near your class
- Do not allow older siblings to participate in a class and run the risk of overwhelming and running over the little ones
- Children can also hide in gaps between mats and behind large dismount mats
- Toys such as beanbag toss are great, however some toys can be used as projectiles and weapons so watch for improper uses
- Sneaky parents with hot coffee and espresso drinks on the floor can cause a spill and possibly burn a child
- Parents with improper footwear, clogs, low/high heels can injure children if they step on them, or hurt themselves if they step on/off a mat.
- Unguarded purses and backpacks on the floor are definite slipping and tripping hazards

Emergency Action Plans

Every gym should have a plan for every potential emergency. Many minor injuries can be taken care of by a quick Band-Aid, a few minutes of rest, or by applying ice to the injured area. First aid supplies should be available at all times. Ice cups and frozen sponges should be kept in a readily available freezer. To protect the child’s skin from freezing, use towels or some other available covering but try to avoid directly applying ice to exposed skin. For personal safety reasons, the first aid provider should treat any bloody injury carefully. If

staff must handle such an injury they must be required to wear rubber gloves, provided with the first aid kit. Staff members are not to administer any first aid unless it is an emergency. If a child has a blister or a rip and it can be treated with a Band-Aid or piece of gauze and some tape, it is okay. If the rip or blister is causing a great deal of discomfort, the parent should be notified. If a child has a loose tooth and they can extract it themselves, it is okay, but staff is not to assist them in any way. Simply put, a Band-Aid (applied by the child to their own injury) or an ice pack is about the extent of care staff should provide. Anything more should be directed to the parent and a medical professional. There is a sample simple Emergency Action Plan in the Appendix that may be used as a model to develop a specific plan for your gym. Above all, have a written Emergency Action Plan, practice it and follow it!

Incident / Accident Reports

All information regarding an incident, accident, injury or unusual occurrence must be *detailed* in a report to the supervisor/director before the end of the work shift. Be certain that all information is accurate and completed in detail. Do not include opinion or hearsay in a report; include ONLY factual information based upon personal observation but include as much detail as possible. A general rule of thumb is to complete an accident report anytime a student requires first aid (ice, band aid, etc.) or needs to sit out and rest for more than one activity. All major accidents must be reported immediately. The supervisor will review the report and submit a copy to the gym owner within 24 hours. All information regarding the injured person and any witnesses is strictly confidential. For your own protection, do not discuss any accident with anyone other than the supervisor or the owner.

The gym owner, or their designee will contact the insurance company in the event of a possible claim. Detailed reporting is critical.

A notification must be made informing the parent that an incident has occurred requiring treatment and that a report has been filed and they should check with the supervisor or the owner for details of the incident. Do not give a copy of the report to anyone (including the parent) except the manager or gym owner.

Calling 9-1-1

If an athlete lands on her head or neck or has an injury that is significant and will require emergency room care, call 9-1-1. Even if the parent is present, it is better to have the EMTs come assess the injury and give the parent the option of transporting the child

themselves or having the EMTs take the child. If the child's parents are not at the gym, call 9-1-1 first, then the parents. If the EMTs determine the child needs to be transported to the hospital, a gym staff member can either go in the ambulance (if permitted by the EMTs) or should follow behind in a car until the parent or guardian of the child arrives at the hospital. Additionally, all gym clubs should have readily available an emergency medical release that has the child's insurance information, allergies (if any) and consent to treat. Copies of these documents should travel with the EMTs (with the originals remaining at the gym) so that the ER can have as much information as possible before the parent or guardian arrives.

Dealing With the Media After a Crisis

You may have been in business for decades and it has never happened to you. You may have been in business for weeks and been subject to it. You hope it never happens. But imagine that a parent accuses your gym of causing injury to their child or an employee sues for personal injury arising out of a disciplinary action. Handling these events will be difficult enough. Add the dimension of dealing with the media, and your task becomes even more challenging. Whether or not you like the idea of contending with reporters, cameras, and microphones, you may need to. Having a "media strategy" in mind before a crisis will help you.

Reporters are trained and educated in their field just as you are in your profession. Accept their right to ask questions to keep the public informed. If you provide a reporter with background information and answer questions clearly and truthfully, the reporter will make every effort to be fair. Tough questions don't trip people up. Sloppy answers to easy questions are what do people in. Be aware, however, that even the most effective media relations plan won't always result in favorable press. Expect to be on the receiving end of criticism occasionally. Nothing is 100 percent off the record. "I don't know, but I will find out and get back to you before your deadline" is an infinitely better thing to say to a reporter than making up facts that don't turn out to be true. Notes are made and reviewed by editors, publishers and lawyers.

Contact Your Insurer

The first step in any crisis is to report the incident to your insurance agent immediately, no matter the severity of the claim. If the claim has the potential to catch the media's attention, it's important that you have early contact with your insurance company.

While contacting your agent and / or insurance company is the ideal first step, it's not always possible.

A story comes to light; the media will run with it. An accident occurs; a photographer arrives on the scene with a camera. Sometimes the media will be at your door or on your phone before you are able to talk with your insurance company. In this scenario, you'll need to develop a carefully controlled message sent through one spokesperson.

There are some key tips to dealing with the media in a crisis:

- **BE PREPARED**
- Understand that the media needs a story...let it be a controlled, child-focused story that will help restore the public's confidence in how you treat the safety and security of the children. Take a deep breath, refer to your positive points and talk to the reporter about YOUR gym!
- Designate one person in your organization to speak to the media. The spokesperson should be articulate, diplomatic, and sincere. Your spokesperson, in essence, becomes the "voice" of your business on the television, in the newspaper, and over the airwaves. If that person appears caring and concerned, your organization will be perceived as such. If possible, individual personnel should not speak with the media. Have a back-up plan in case this designated person is unavailable. Be sure to tell all of your staff who these people are and how to contact them when the media calls!
- Anticipate questions reporters will ask. Determine ahead of time what you will say and what you won't or can't say. Have fact sheets prepared. Prepare a written statement for distribution with the help of your attorney. Be sure to share this information with your staff. They may feel very threatened and/or demoralized by the bad publicity and may be receiving front line questions from clients, families and friends.
- Speak in sound bites —short sentences and concise thoughts. Don't ramble. Emphasize key points made in the news release, and don't deviate from them.
- Develop a response other than "no comment." If a criminal act has allegedly occurred, as in the case of child abuse, issue a brief statement like this: "The safety and well-being of our youth are extremely important to us. We are cooperating with the authorities in their investigation, and any comments made before the investigation is complete would be premature."
- Avoid extremes. Do not defend yourself too strenuously, appearing too eager to avoid blame; do

not lock yourself in your office, appearing to avoid responsibility.

- Maintain an open mind and a good attitude about dealing with the media. Much of the time these professionals want to work with you, not against you. Your comfort level or attitude toward the media could influence the treatment you receive.
- Announce that you take the problem seriously. Then take it seriously, even if you think the issue is non-existent or overblown. Whether it was a real problem before, it certainly is a reputation management issue now that the press has it.
- If you are concerned that the problem is too large for you to handle comfortably, consider contacting a public relations firm that specializes in crisis management.
- Don't lie. If you (or your staff) screwed up, talk to your lawyer and admit it. The media is relatively kinder to those who openly admit they screwed up. It's disarming. Although they may not become your friend, they will at least realize that you have a conscience. That realization alone can be the difference between a hostile story and one that respects the sometimes-complicated choices we all make when performing our duties.

After experiencing a disaster it is vital that a thorough review is undertaken of how the organization responded and coped with the emergency. Lessons can always be learned and these will not only improve the response should there be another incident, but could prevent a future disaster. It therefore makes sense to be sure to let the media know what you did in analyzing the situation and improving the response to avoid any future crisis.

Probably the best defense against negative publicity is a strong, positive relationship with the local reporters before anything "bad" occurs. If an incident occurs that could cause you and your organization grief. Be prepared with ready answers to probable questions and a couple of choice sound bytes that will look good in the paper or sound good when quoted.

Employer Risk Management

When a gymnastics coach hears the words "safety" and "risk management," they probably think about things like spotting, teaching progressions, safety certification and medical insurance. A gym owner may think about things like coach's certifications, liability and worker compensation insurance and maybe equipment and facility inspections. One aspect of risk management that typically does not get enough attention by gym owners is managing the risk of being an employer.

Workplace risk includes safety and litigation risk. Though the actual responsibilities of being an employer vary by state and are governed by legislation and numerous agencies including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Fair Labor Standards, Family and Medical Leave Act, Department of Labor, National Labor Relations Board, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), etc., there are some customary workplace wrongdoings that require our attention.

- **Harassment.** Harassment can include hostile work environment or quid pro quo (exchange for privileged treatment) sexual harassment. Sexual and other forms of harassment is a common problem. Over 16,000 cases are brought each year against employers (US Department of Labor). Men, women, co-workers, managers, customers, parents, students, owners, vendors, contractors and others file such claims.
- **Workplace violence.** Although gymnastics may not be considered at “high risk” for potential violence, the welfare of others and your own safety are at stake. Workplace violence accounts for 2 million physical attacks and 6 million threatened attacks each year in America. Thirty five percent of all violent crime occurs at the job site.
- **Theft.** Embezzlement includes taking money from the cash register, making personal copies without authorization, billing personal phone calls to the organization, running personal errands on organization time and other forms of fraud. Theft by employees costs the American economy an estimated \$40 billion each year.
- **Discrimination.** Are you an Equal Opportunity Employer? Federal law prohibits discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age or disability. Have you identified the essential functions of the jobs you hire for and what “reasonable accommodations” you could provide in order to be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act? The Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees covered employees (of employers with 50 or more total employees) up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave for certain family and medical situations. The increasing number of claims being made under this law illustrates that not all employers appreciate the significance of this legislation.
- **Unsafe work practices and workplace injuries.** If a child gets a bloody rip on bars or one of your pre-school students has an “accident” on the floor exercise carpet, do you have established procedures (that are practiced and followed) for blood borne

pathogens in your gym? Do you train your staff on proper lifting techniques and ergonomics? Do your coaches have the proper equipment to do their jobs safely? Regardless of the size of our organization or the number of staff, you have the duty to provide for the safety and welfare of all your employees.

There are even more issues; unfair labor practices, retaliation, workers’ compensation fraud, to name only a few others. If you think that these problems could never affect you, you are wrong. Liability for workplace wrongdoing can arise from the behavior of employees, supervisors and managers. Non-employees who interact with your organization; volunteers, vendors, clients, independent contractors, board members, visitors and more also produce risk and loss exposure.

We live in a litigious society that allows anyone to bring a lawsuit against anyone else at any time for any reason. The only people that really enjoy lawsuits are lawyers. Remember that everyone has access to a lawyer and when a lawyer’s telephone rings, it rings with a “ch-ching” rather than a “ring-ring.” Lawyers are always looking for opportunities for work. Don’t be a victim of an employee lawsuit that could ruin your business and your reputation. Most small organizations cannot bear the expense of a single successful claim against them. Even if you win the lawsuit, you lose; your valuable time is wasted, your attention to your business is disrupted, your credibility is impugned, staff morale is affected and your insurance premiums could be impacted.

Be prepared. In order to properly deal with these issues and avoid a lawsuit, there are some recommended guidelines for employers to follow. The first defensive measure an employer can take to avoid a legal action is to conduct thorough background checks of all applicants. Follow up on all references, watch for employment gaps and other “red flags.” Negligent hiring or negligent retention places you at risk of a legal claim. Gym owners should also offer and require ongoing training to his/her employees. A set of reporting standards should be established. A “zero-tolerance” policy for any violation of practices or procedures should also be enforced. Even though this no tolerance policy is imperative, an atmosphere of open communication and empathy must exist in the organization. An employee should be able to feel that their concerns are important to their employer and will be dealt with appropriately. The best defense against a lawsuit is a strong positive relationship with your employees so that they trust you and your responses to their issues.

Purchasing an employment practices liability insurance policy is a great way to protect the gym from errors and

omissions in hiring and personnel issues. Each and every layer of defensibility and protection may save a gymnastics business a lawsuit.

Managing Social Media Risks

Without question, social media has revolutionized not only the way we connect with friends and family but also how we conduct business, including the hiring, discipline and termination of any gym's most valuable asset—its employees. This asset can quickly become a liability, however, if social-media risks are not effectively managed. Here are some points to help your clients lessen those risks.

The Hiring Process

Many gym owners' first stop during the hiring process is social-media outlets to screen applicants. They turn to LinkedIn or Facebook to learn more about an applicant's education, their friends or even their social behavior.

Sometimes, a candidate is rejected based on content found on the applicant's social-media pages, which could include inappropriate photos or comments, references to alcohol and substance abuse, discriminatory comments, slanderous statements and/or the sharing of confidential information regarding their previous employer, proof of poor communication skills, and exaggeration of their qualifications.

While the above reasons are legitimate cause for concern, and employers advantageously have social media at their disposal to help prevent negligent hiring, a business can be at risk for discrimination if accessing social-media sites that contain protected class (e.g. religion) information not privileged in the normal course of the hiring process. To mitigate this risk, employers should use outside third parties in their hiring process, including background-verification companies and/or recruiters who document content acquired on social-media sites in the candidate-selection process.

Establishing a Social-Media Policy

Employers need to have a solid social-media policy in place. This policy should:

- Outline what constitutes inappropriate use of social media, from personal use during work hours to the type of content posted, including defamatory language about the company, photos of children attending the gym or references to any gym clients that could be considered a violation of the client's privacy.
- Address the penalties for disclosure of trade secrets and proprietary information on public pages, in a language and context that can be understood clearly.

- Address disciplinary action and termination procedures for any violation of social-media use in its various forms.

If an employer is considering disciplinary action, including termination based on content found on a social-media site or other inappropriate use of social media, it is imperative to adequately document the content that is the basis for the action. Print out the offending pages and be sure to include dates, times, locations, etc.

Gym owners, however, need to caution themselves on the content and extent of the policy itself. One of the issues most commonly raised in claims alleges that an employer has overly broad policies restricting employee use of social media. The policy an employer puts in place must align with the National Labor Relations Act's (NLRA) description of protected and violating behavior. As always, it would be in the interest of the employer to consult with an attorney who specializes in employment-practices liability when developing social-media guidelines.

Blood-Borne Pathogen Controls

ALL EMPLOYEES should be required to follow these safe work practice controls:

- Eating, drinking, smoking, applying cosmetics or lip balm, and handling contact lenses should be prohibited in work areas where there is a reasonable likelihood of occupational exposure to blood borne pathogens.
- All procedures involving blood or other potentially infectious materials shall be performed in such a manner as to minimize splashing, spraying, spattering, and generation of droplets of these substances.
- Wash hands immediately after removal of latex gloves. When hand washing facilities are not available, use antiseptic hand cleansers and wash hands with soap and water as soon as feasible.

Hand Washing Procedures

- Always use soap and warm water.
- Bring soap to a full lather on front and back of hands.
- Rinse hands under warm water for at least 15 seconds

Safe Work Practices

1. Always wear latex gloves whenever there is a potential for contact with blood.

2. If there is any chance of splashes or splattering, wear eye protection and a facemask.
3. Use puncture resistant gloves if reaching into areas or cleaning areas that is not easily visible.
4. Isolate the area. Only authorized personnel properly trained should enter the area.
5. Needles and other sharps must be put into a puncture resistant container and sealed. Pick up needles and other sharps by mechanical means, such as broom and dustpan, or tongs.
6. Use the emergency cleanup kit supplied by your department. If the incident is too large for the emergency cleanup kit to handle, contact a biohazard cleanup contractor.
7. For a final cleaning, contaminated areas must be decontaminated with an appropriate disinfectant (1:10 ratio bleach to water) immediately or as soon as feasible.
8. All equipment and tools intended for re-use shall be thoroughly decontaminated with disinfectant solution.
9. Broken glassware that may be contaminated shall NOT be picked up directly with the hands. It shall be picked up using mechanical means such as a brush and dustpan, or tongs.
10. Properly dispose of gloves and any materials containing bodily fluids in a safe manner immediately after potential contamination.
11. Wash hands immediately after removal of gloves. When hand washing facilities are not available, use antiseptic hand cleansers and wash hands with soap and water as soon as feasible.

Medical Emergencies

1. Always wear latex gloves, even before you are sure you need them.
2. If there is any chance of splashes or splattering, wear eye protection and a facemask.
3. Properly dispose of gloves immediately after potential contamination.
4. Wash hands immediately after removal of gloves. When hand washing facilities are not available, use antiseptic hand cleansers and wash hands with soap and water as soon as feasible.
5. For clean up, put on latex gloves and wash the contaminated area using the emergency cleanup kit. If the incident is too large for the emergency cleanup kit to handle, contract with a biohazard cleanup contractor.

6. For a final cleaning, contaminated areas must be decontaminated with an appropriate disinfectant (1:10 ratio bleach to water) immediately or as soon as feasible.

Regulated Waste

Regulated waste means liquid or semi-liquid blood, or contaminated items that would release blood or other potentially infectious materials in a liquid or semi-liquid state if compressed. If you squeeze the contaminated material or wring it out and it drips, then it is bio-hazardous waste. Regulated Waste shall be placed in designated red bio hazard bags that are:

1. Thick enough to contain the materials without leakage;
2. Double bag for additional precaution if needed;
3. Labeled and color-coded;
4. Closed and tied for transport.

Disposal Procedures

Determine whether the contaminated materials are a biohazard-regulated waste. Items that contain liquid, or semi-liquid blood, or are caked with dried blood, and are capable of releasing blood when handled or compressed, must be disposed of as bio-hazardous regulated waste. Do not attempt to wring out or twist an item, if in doubt contact Medical Personnel for a determination.

Mop heads and other equipment used to clean up a contaminated site can be thoroughly washed with diluted bleach (10:1) and then re-used or disposed of as regular garbage. Items such as shirts or Band-Aids, which will NOT release blood when compressed, can be disposed of in the regular garbage.

1. Place contaminated waste in red/orange biohazard bags and seal using safe work practice procedures described above.
2. If emergency medical technicians or the fire department is on scene, determine if they can properly dispose of the waste.
3. Clothing that is contaminated with blood or body fluids may be bagged in biohazard bags, sealed, and held for owner/parent pick-up.
 - a. Place contaminated waste in designated bags using safe work practice procedures as described.
 - b. Do not compress the material into the designated red bag or bio-waste container.
 - c. Dispose of your gloves into the bag.

- d. Put on a fresh pair of latex gloves before touching the bag again and to seal the bio-hazardous waste bag. Ensure it is mark clearly as bio-hazardous waste. Double bag the material if the material in the bag is dripping with blood or there is a chance of leakage.
 - e. Do not carry bio-hazardous waste against your body or from the bottom of the bag.
 - f. Remove your gloves before handling anything other than the bio-hazardous waste, including opening of doors.
 - g. Wash your hands immediately after handling the waste bag.
4. As soon as feasible, contact proper personnel at the Police Department or your local Medical Center for disposal.

Contagious Disease Exposures

A Contagious Disease Exposure Notice should be sent home with the students and all staff should be notified any time you receive notification that one of the children in your facility has been exposed and may be contagious to other students. You have the responsibility to notify the parents if their children are at risk of contracting lice (from your mats or the pit), conjunctivitis (pink eye), impetigo or some other communicable disease as the result of exposure at your facility.

You may wish to notify the parents of your students if you are made aware of a contact at another location (such as a local school) that may affect some of your students. Contact your County Health Department for any specific regulations or requirements for your area. Local health officials may also provide you with additional resources including a form letter to use.

Gymnastics professionals should accept this often unpleasant but truly important task as part of their responsibilities. Ignoring a problem does not make it go away. If may be no fun to send home that exposure notice but it is the right thing to do and understanding parents will ultimately respect you for it.

Ergonomics for coaches

Chronic back pain, sore shoulders, strained knees, tender wrists, elbow pain... Sound like a checklist of injuries for our National Team? Fortunately it is not. Unfortunately, it is a checklist of common ailments to gymnastics coaches.

The number one cause of workplace fatalities is slips and falls. OSHA safety studies show that back injuries are the primary cause of many lost workdays. Nearly 18% of the lost work time for employees is due to chronic back pain. Back problems can result in pain, lost work time, inconvenience, and possible disability. The back is the most injury-prone part of the body. Almost everyone will suffer back pain at some time in his or her life. Gymnastics coaches are inherently at risk for back injuries. Can you afford to be out of work due to a bad back? Can your gym afford to lose a valuable employee to an injury? Preventing back injury is much easier than correcting or healing a back injury.



At work or play, we are likely to push our bodies past their capacity by doing the same action over and over. With camp season soon upon us, think about the number of kips you could end up spotting in a week. Over time, improper lifting practices cause fatigue and pain that can lead to structural problems in the spine and to back injuries. Gymnastics coaches must learn and practice correct lifting techniques and foster back and muscle health. Use good body mechanics while spotting:

- Lift with the gymnast as close to you as possible. The load on the spine increases as the distance away from the spine increases.
- Pivot your feet! Practice moving your feet a lot as you spot.
- Twisting and lifting is extremely hazardous to the spine. The low back vertebrae are only meant to rotate four degrees.
- Look for innovative ways to protect yourself, as well as the gymnast.
- Position spotting blocks safely and create gadgets to save your back and body.
- Bend your knees, keep your back straight and keep your head up. You will need to have normal hamstring length.
- Think about good mechanics ALWAYS. In the gym it's a must, but do not forget to carry it out for the rest of your day.
- Use your lower abdominals - contract the external obloquies as a corset.

On-the-job safety and a healthy workplace are crucial factors in creating an environment that facilitates

success and productivity for you, your employees, and your students. Start building a more healthy and safe workplace by incorporating an ergonomic safety program in your gym for all employees who might be at risk of Cumulative Trauma Disorders (CTD) or Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) resulting from repetitive motions, use of excessive force, or awkward positions during the course of their duties in the workplace. Provide your staff with back supports, braces, or try to vary their work assignments in order to avoid Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI). Offer classes on how the back works, common types and causes of back injuries, effects of back injuries, injury prevention and safety practices, proper lifting techniques, and back exercises. Make sure you and your staff maintain healthy lifestyles (the same as you are promoting to your athletes):

- Be in the best aerobic shape that you can get in.
- Get a check-up by your physician.
- Engage in aerobic exercise (exercise regularly: walk, run, bike, NordicTrak, swim, etc.).
- Stand and sit in good posture (*see below).
- Stretch the muscle groups that need to be stretched by strengthening the opposite side (work the antagonist)

Posture Test and Exercise:

- Stand with your back against a wall (heels about 3 inches away from the wall) and place one hand behind your neck and one hand behind your low back. If there is too much space between your back and the wall, i.e., if you can easily move your hands back and forth, you may need to correct your posture. Corrective Exercise: Wall Exercise: Stand with back against the wall, heels about 3 inches from the wall. Place hands up beside head with elbows touching wall. If needed, correct feet and knees, then tilt pelvis to flatten low back against wall by pulling up and in with the lower abdominal muscles. Keeping arms in contact with wall, move arms slowly to a diagonally overhead position. (Hold several seconds and repeat 5 to 8 times.)
- Check your hamstring length. Back lying, single straight leg raise should be 80 degrees. Corrective Exercise: Hamstring Stretch: Sit on a mat with the low back against the wall or in a chair. Keep one knee bent and straighten the other leg. Be sure to keep the pelvis in a neutral position - do not slump or excessively arch the low back. Pull the ankle into dorsiflexion to stretch the gastrocnemius (calf) muscles that originate above the knee. Hold several seconds and repeat 5 to 8 times, alternating legs.

Elbow, wrist, and hand injuries also account for lost

work time. I doubt I am the only coach to ever suffer a jammed thumb from improper placement of my hand while spotting aerials. Repetitive spotting of hand-springs can place an enormous amount of stress and strain on sensitive soft tissues. Ergonomics can help physically position you in your workspace to reduce stress, strain, and fatigue. Learn and practice easy, effective, and inexpensive things you can do right now to reduce your risk of injury. By doing so, you will also increase your productivity. With improved ergonomics, you will reduce your risk of injuries or discomforts related to repetitive strain injuries. If any activities cause pain or discomfort, employees (coaches or office staff) as well as athletes should stop immediately and consult a doctor.

Coaches should take steps to improve their personal work environment.

- Identify the effects of improper positions and poor habits on your body
- Identify easy, effective, and inexpensive things that you can begin doing right now to reduce your risk of injury
- Recognize how stress may contribute to repetitive strain injuries, and list common sources of stress, and techniques for reducing stress
- Identify the basic concepts of ergonomics.
- Recognize the fundamental components of human anatomy commonly affected by ergonomic-related disorders.
- Recognize typical ergonomic-related disorders.
- Identify the ergonomic risk factors associated with the job.
- Select how to evaluate ergonomic risks and identify control measures for avoiding ergonomic-related disorders.

Proper positions and technique is essential to helping prevent injuries due to cumulative trauma from repetitive tasks such as spotting. The costs of teaching your coaches how to protect themselves against injuries such as Cumulative Trauma Disorders can be expensive. But the costs of not making that investment are much higher—and sometimes ruinous. Employers often must pay for medical treatment or workers' compensation for employees injured by repetitive work. In extreme cases, workers with serious workplace-related cumulative trauma injuries have sued their employers under OSHA regulation 51(a), which requires employers to provide a safe environment for their employees.

The hidden costs of cumulative trauma injuries are even more damaging. In fact, experts estimate that the hidden costs of cumulative trauma injuries are two to seven times as great as the visible costs. Avoidable injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome and back strain cut into workers' productivity, sometimes forcing employees to miss work or change careers altogether. Who among us can afford to lose coaches and instructors?

Before your employees complain of sore forearms or wrists or lower back pain, invest in their as well as your future. Think of it as an investment in your employees. The fact that you are willing to invest in their well-being can also help build loyalty, boost morale, and improve employee retention.

Keep it Safe

You've spent years planning. It took months to find the perfect location and building. You've spent hours pouring over the latest catalogs. You talked to sales reps and coaches across the country. You've visited dozens of other gyms gathering ideas. You followed the USA Gymnastics Safety Manual guidelines as if they were Gospel.

Now the top-of-line, state-of-the-art equipment has been installed. The apparatus has been checked—and rechecked—to ensure things are installed, bolted and fastened properly. You've done everything within your power to ensure the safest gym possible. Your work is done, right? Wrong. Not even close.

Providing a safe gym is a responsibility that will last as long as the business does. Such care requires constant maintenance and vigilance. And to do it properly, gym owners must dedicate more employee attention to the equipment. It's not that hard, but most gym owners/coaches still don't want to do it. They don't have the time or inclination.

A dangerous gym, however, can end up costing more than just a few man-hours. In today's litigious society, gym owners often find themselves the focus of lawsuits. The best way to avoid legal headaches, of course, is to prevent them. Here are a few steps to keeping a safe gym.

1. Design

Deciding where equipment should go is a lot like opening a business. It's all about location, location, location. You should always double check to ensure your facility has the safest flow and arrangement possible.

Bars, without question, should demand your greatest attention in this area because they are the piece of equipment most likely to cause injury due to flying bodies. Next to floor exercise, due to the size of the apparatus, including the support cables and dismount areas needed; bars require the most space available.

All apparatus should be positioned in a logical way to avoid distractive traffic nearby; if your gym classes rotate from event to event, it makes sense to design your gym with the layout that minimizes the cross traffic as the students move.

When picking a design for the building, be mindful of traffic patterns and place the restrooms on the near side of the gym (close to the viewing areas) so everyone who needs to use them can avoid crossing busy areas.

2. Mats

Find an injured child in a gym, and chances are they hurt themselves falling off the equipment. Certainly injuries can occur hitting the apparatus but roughly 60 percent of all injuries result from a fall from apparatus.

Gym owners can greatly reduce the chances of injury with various types of appropriate landing surfaces. Be it a loose-fill pit, a resi-pit, a sting mat, landing mat or ethafoam tumbling surface; match the matting to the skill being attempted (remember that every skill should be considered as "being attempted" rather than "being performed" to help you think about the risks involved) and the apparatus.

Gym caretakers should check the entire area regularly to ensure it is properly matted. Heavy activity never fails to cause shifting, leaving dangerous gaps and overlaps that create hazards to falling children.

Manufacturers also should provide testing results to indicate the proper impact attenuation of the mat and the life expectancy of the materials. Replace mats before they become a hazard.

Experts recommend that all mats be inspected regularly. They must be checked for rips and tears in the cover, worn soft spots, uneven wear, etc. Make sure that all inspections are documented and recorded for use in the event of a lawsuit.

3. Maintaining Equipment and Apparatus

Pits and mats obviously aren't the only area requiring a dedicated maintenance schedule. The equipment and apparatus also need constant attention.

On bars, for example, all spin locks and cables should be checked regularly. Staff also should scrutinize bolts for severe wear, floor plates for proper connections and deterioration of bar rail bearings. When is the last time you checked the load bearing connections on the ring rig or took a close look at the spotting belt pulleys?

Gym owners should ensure their employees regularly inspect the apparatus for flaws. The maintenance plan should include everything from mundane chores such as tightening up loose connections to more critical examinations of bolts, welding points and moving parts.

Experts recommend daily inspections, though many concede it would be impossible given the circumstances in most gyms. However, the only way any examination systems will work is if they become a top priority. Gym owners need to show their coaches they're committed to the idea by carving time out of busy workdays for inspections.

As always, keep a written record of your maintenance program. Proper maintenance isn't that difficult and the equipment just may last longer! Finally, all equipment has a life expectancy; wood deteriorates, metal fatigues and mats get soft. When apparatus gets old, replace it.

4. Age Appropriate Skills

Simply put, children need to act their age; not so simply, coaches need to remember that. Coaches often can get carried away, especially as time goes on, in the thought that the earlier a skill is taught to a gymnast, the better.

The majority of preschool-age children injured in gyms last year were on equipment designed for older children. In many cases, the bar rails were too large for a small child to grip or equipment was too high or too far apart for the children to reach. In other instances, the apparatus required strength or coordination not possessed by someone younger than five years of age. Preschool-age children need to be allowed to explore the limits of their physical abilities in a safe environment.

School-age children, on the other hand, should be exposed to skills but only in a logical, progressive way. Make sure that skills are mastered before allowing the gymnast to attempt more advanced skills. Even elite athletes must learn to walk before they can run. Lesson planning with a solid curriculum of progressions is the only way to maintain safety in teaching gymnastic skills.

It's up to you

I may be naïve in believing that if I write enough about safety and risk management that someday, somehow, everyone will have a culture of safety awareness in their gym. The ultimate goal of fewer and less serious injuries keeps me typing away. I visit a lot of gyms and see a lot of good safety practices and I also see a lot of hazardous situations. I make recommendations and suggestions and even get personally involved making changes that I think are important enough to deal with immediately. There are many great safety and risk management resources available (the USA Gymnastics Safety Manual remains the best) but ultimately, it is up to YOU.

Now that you've designed a safe gym, equipped it properly, dedicated your resources to minimize injuries, there's still one last chore. You must create the culture of safety in your gym. Experts encourage gym owners to be aware of ever changing situations. Follow established guidelines, monitor modifications, adjust equipment accordingly, prepare your staff and reduce the possibility of successful lawsuits.

The best way to monitor and manage the risk of gymnastics is to keep it safe.

Risk Management Samples

- [Emergency Action Plan](#)
- [Equipment and Apparatus Warranty Tracker](#)
- [Equipment and Facility Inspection Form](#)
- [Incident Log](#)
- [Incident Report Form](#)
- [Risk Evaluation Report Card template](#)
- [Roof Inspection Checklist](#)
- [Waiver and Medical History Form](#)
- [Gymnastics Best Practices Self – Evaluation Report Card](#)

Key Points

- Gym owners have many legal responsibilities and must provide a standard of care to their employees and clientele.
- Gym owners face a multitude of loss exposures and identify these risks through a process of Risk Assessment.
- Once a gym's risks have been identified, controls are selected to eliminate or reduce the frequency and/or severity of the potential loss.
- Implementing loss controls is a conscious decision to avoid, accept, retain or transfer the risk.
- Transferring risk is accomplished through insurance or by contract – waivers, hold harmless, and indemnification agreements.
- Gym owners must be extremely cognizant with regard to insurance, making sure policies are current and any policy exclusions are fully understood.
- USA Gymnastics University Safety and Risk Management Certification and ongoing training is essential for all gymnastics professionals.
- A loss exposure that is often overlooked is in regular gym administrative operations. Proper work safety plans and cash handling protocols should not be ignored.
- Regular, comprehensive facility maintenance and inspections should be performed and documented.
- Equipment and apparatus must be inspected, maintained, and replaced according to original equipment manufacturer's guidelines. All repairs and examinations should be logged with dates and the name of the person responsible.
- Engaging the participant as a partner in their own safety is a good way to avoid accidents. Educate parents and participants about the inherent risks of gymnastics and create a safety team where the students have appropriate responsibility in their own safety.
- Each event and every piece of apparatus has its own unique characteristics of risk. Proper use of equipment contributes to a safe environment in the gym.
- A written emergency action plan is a document that every gym should have. Addressing all actions needed to effectively and efficiently respond to an emergency situation is important for every potential emergency.
- Logging and recording all unusual incidents is important for many reasons. Reviewing incident reports can help identify previously unrecognized risks, highlight changes needed in the emergency action plan, and can also be helpful in defending a gym in the event of a lawsuit.

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CHAPTER NINE

DEVELOPING YOUR GYMNASTICS BUSINESS



After planning, starting and operating your gymnastics business, the next step is developing your business. Developing a business is generally understood to be increasing sales and growing a business to higher revenues. There are three ways to grow any business – get new customers, sell more of the same product or service to existing customers, or sell existing customers new products or services. To develop any business requires strong relationships – relationships with customers, with employees, and with the community. Providing a quality program is not enough – gym owners must remember that from a true business perspective, it is all about long-term sustainability and increased revenues.

Establish goals for your business. What gets measured gets done. If you want to develop your business, you need to know what success looks like. Create goals and objectives for enrollment and revenues. While quality is obviously important to sustained growth, and lack of quality operations will negatively affect business development, the growth is measured in quantity of students, which directly relates to the quantity of dollars.

To develop your business, master your marketing. Through the years, marketing has evolved from newspaper and yellow pages ads to Internet and social media advertising, but one thing has remained constant – your relationship with current customers brings them back for return business and provides an alliance that will be your businesses best source of marketing. Word-of-mouth advertising is the most effective way to promote any business. A positive relationship with current customers will result in developing new customers.

Follow best practices. In any business there are standard operating procedures and industry benchmarks. There is no reason to try and reinvent the wheel when you can model your operations after other successful gyms. Save yourself some time and effort by using systems and practices that have been proven effective. Monitor trends and events that affect your business and adjust your practices accordingly.

Finding partnerships is another golden opportunity to developing your business. Use your imagination to find alliances with other businesses that compliment your operation. Whether bartering or partnering, collaboration is a true win-win situation. Associating with local day care centers, fitness centers, nursery schools, other youth sports organizations, even pediatric health care providers or similar partners are a great way to develop additional business for the gym.



Another way to expand your business is a common practice of diversifying your gym's services. Adding dance classes, cheerleading, martial arts, or even childcare can help a gym owner grow income and develop their business. Diversification provides your business with new revenue streams and opportunities.

Adding new programs allow the gym to share resources such as marketing, staff, infrastructure, and facilities. Cross training of staff and expanding your labor pool can have additional benefits aside from increased revenues. Financial risks are distributed and reduced by spreading the exposures among different programs.

Finally, following best practices of hiring, training, empowering staff, your employees become partners in developing your gymnastics business. Talented and motivated staff members can bring big improvements in your business.

As gyms become an important place in communities and gym owners continue to define success — the key to staying successful is to maintain an operation and budget that allows them to regularly update programming, facility and equipment. On a basic level, many owners also need to update their ideas about the kinds of amenities and services that gymnastics facilities should offer and what they're worth to patrons.

People may gravitate to gymnastics centers as a result of the Olympics, but if people begin losing interest in their local gym, one reason might be because there is not enough to keep and entertain them. In the past, facilities were used mainly for competitive teams and some recreational classes, but today's customers mostly want to have fun. Nowadays, people are looking

for something fresh, more than just the traditional competitive gymnastics center. And if they don't find it at their local gym, they go elsewhere.

Many gym owners have found that adding extra amenities and services to broaden the appeal of a facility is a great way to keep attendance high, even in the face of competition. Multipurpose amenities can range from multiple pieces of equipment to outdoor play features, rock climbing walls, inflatables and bouncers, ball courts, concessions, lounge and/or study areas, weight rooms, fitness center, dance studio and a competitive area for serious gymnasts. Another plus of multipurpose gyms is that different amenities can have vastly different uses, depending on the audience. Making a gym more multipurpose doesn't mean you have to start from scratch or add elaborate new features. Sometimes just incorporating a few new activities can make a big difference.

In addition to having the right gymnastics amenities, it is important to make a facility as attractive as possible. Gone are the days of converted warehouses and industrial buildings that look more like a prison barracks or a factory than a gymnastics center. People expect something stylish. People expect comfortable viewing areas and concessions.

Successful facilities need to offer entertainment services and amenities. For amenities, think comfortable chairs and new equipment. Services include Wi-Fi and top-notch concessions along with parties, private lessons and fun classes. Such amenities aren't just nice — they're vital to a facility's survival. If gyms don't change and upgrade their customer's experience, they might as well close.

But there's a lot more to successful facilities than just their entertainment value. Many also find great success with superior programs — ones that go beyond the traditional. You can only teach so many lessons and have so many kids on the team. You need more preschool classes, more parties, and more activities that engage different segments of the population. This is what makes your gym the social magnet for the community.

Programs can make the difference. For example, your gym could host a "celebrity handstand contest" featuring local dignitaries from the mayor to teachers, movie nights and parties, free family nights, tumbling relays and Fourth of July events. Offer year-round activities including lessons, adult classes, parent-child

In Depth

After the first year in business, a new gym owner will typically find it easier to develop their business than it was starting it. Once a full annual cycle has been experienced, a gym owner often feels more comfortable with operations moving into the second year because they have had time to modify systems and fine tune procedures. In the beginning, there is a lot of experimentation, trial and error, and learning from mistakes. There must be some stability before a gym owner can shift gears and grow their business. As minor changes are implemented during the first year, new opportunities will be recognized, and growth can occur. Following a year of operation, a gym will mature and its identity will be formalized. This development allows further changes to be to solidify the gym's brand.

programs and a senior aerobics class. Programs like these (appropriate for YOUR gym) are what can be considered to bring in families and help a gym stay successful. That's just the kind of fresh thinking all facilities need to incorporate if they want to continue to thrive.

Programs

Successful gyms offer a wide range of programs, with something to fit the interests of just about anyone. Ideas include private or semi-private preschool lessons and fitness classes, competitive teams, open gym, demonstrations, movie nights, games, family nights and parties. If the market desires it, consider adding ball sports programs (pee-wee basketball, pre soccer classes, etc.), dance classes (ballet, jazz, hip-hop, modern, etc.), aerobics, cheerleading or martial arts (karate, tae kwon do, judo, aikido, etc.).

Equipment

Today's facility needs to be as multipurpose as possible to remain competitive. Age appropriate play equipment, competitive apparatus, fine motor manipulative toys, open space area, hoops, balls, gross motor equipment, slides and recreational areas are just a few examples of the amenities available to transform a gym into a multipurpose facility. Inflatables and multi-use spaces can add even more options.

Services

Parents and gymnasts want to do more than just gymnastics — a lot more. Offer them concession stands, leotard sales, retail shops and facility rentals. Then watch your sales — and enrollment — climb. Also, don't forget to provide plenty of space for viewing and comfortable chairs for watching classes from.

Aesthetics

I remember someone telling me that no one will come to your gym because the bathrooms and changing rooms are clean, but people will NOT come to your gym if those areas *aren't* clean. No one wants to go to a facility that looks as if it's seen better days or is just plain uninviting. Do whatever you can to keep your facility looking fresh and new, from potted plants to a fresh coat of paint.

Fees

Gym owners must structure their fee schedules to provide enough money to earn a living, provide services, maintain the facility, offer innovative programs, and update amenities. For some facilities, fee schedules are a balancing act between making the classes available to everyone and bringing in enough money. But remember, without enough funding, your business is already on the road to closure. Keep it fresh!

Expanding your Business

As you continue to develop your business, you may wish to take the next step to grow your business even further. Taking what you have learned from your start-up and building on your successes, you may try opening a second location. Make sure you follow your initial efforts and prepare an all-inclusive business plan for a new location. Conduct another thorough market research process and treat a second location as a completely new business. Consider trends and demographics and financing for your new gym. Make sure your administrative systems and management team are able to handle the responsibility of the additional location. There may be some advantages and leveraging opportunities with a second location, but be cautious of overextending your resources.

Branding your business

There are times in our lives when external things just don't make sense. The animal rights activist in the leather jacket eating a Gyro sandwich, the moose mascot walking around Sea World or Ronald McDonald at the Renaissance Fair. These are disconnected experiences trying to somehow connect to us in a

relevant way. The world is filled with "that was almost a great idea."

How do you avoid two totally different brand directions under the same roof of your gym? Start by imagining a singular emotional outcome to everything your company says or does. When you work to shorten your "we want to be everything to everybody" list, it becomes clear what to do. Successful gym owners see the future and can define their true connection to a unique guest experience. If your branded emotional outcome is to "inspire" your customers, then everything you do, say, and produce has to have a subliminal level of inspiration. Develop a brand identity, which will resonate with the customer and reflect the key aspects of your gym, including not only the programs, but also your culture and goals.

If you think only big corporate names need to think about things like brand names, think again. Your brand says a lot about you and your business, and that's as true for a local gymnastics center as it is for a multi-national conglomerate. Creating a strong brand for your business can help you set yourself apart and lay the right foundation for the growth of your business.

What is a brand?

Your brand is more than just your business name or the logo on your website and program flyers. It is your corporate identity. An effective brand tells people who you are, what you do and how you do it, while at the same time establishing your relevance to your customers.

Your brand is how customers perceive your business. If your brand has a high-perceived value, you enjoy many advantages over your competition, especially when it comes to pricing. Why do you think people are prepared to pay exorbitant money for brand items? Perceived value. Perceived value is a result of very effective brand promotion resulting in high recognition. Now, I'm not saying we all need to rush out and start creating brands that are going to be recognized around the world. What I am suggesting, however, is that it is possible for your brand to dominate your niche market.

The main reason for creating your own brand is to differentiate yourself from your competition. Gymnastics programs can be located blocks apart from each other. You need to constantly be looking for ways to set yourself apart from your competition. Your brand can do that for you.

Another good reason for creating your own brand is to make your marketing more effective and efficient. You don't have to spend your time with a new client

explaining who you are, what you do and how you do it. Your brand can already communicate that for you. You can spend your time focusing on students and the gym rather than educating your customers about your business.

Create your own brand

Your brand needs to say who you are, what you do and how you do it. It needs to do all these things at the same time as establishing your relevance to your prospective customers. It is absolutely essential as you build your own brand that you have a firm grasp of who you are, what you do and how you do it. If not, you're going to send mixed messages to your clients and your legitimacy will be in question.

Start with your mission statement. What is the mission of your business? Obviously you're in business to make a profit. Making a profit is a by-product of a successful business. Focus on your core values and the profits will follow.

A good place to begin thinking about your mission is to put yourself in the shoes of your customers. If you're in the market for a gymnastics club, what things are important to you? Different people will be looking for different benefits but you can bet that they want their child to be safe and well cared for. Cost is also likely to be high on the list, as is the training they will receive. These things will be highly important to some and less important to others. So focus on the benefits that are likely to be highly relevant to the majority of your target market. Let's settle for our purposes on safety and skill training education.

Your mission statement might read something like "We Create Champions in the Safest Gymnastics Training Center in the Midwest". That's a pretty general statement and if you decide to focus on a particular niche of the gymnastics market, such as Girls Compulsory levels, you may want to more narrowly focus on that group in your mission statement. Now that you've written your mission statement, you can begin thinking about creating a brand that reinforces and supports your mission. So, getting back to the fundamental questions of who you are, what you do and how you do it, you can now begin to think of your business in these terms. You're a gymnastics center; you safely teach children gymnastics and train them to compete successfully performing compulsory routines and earning championships.

When you create your brand, you need to keep the who, what and how firmly in mind but also use the brand to establish your relevance to your target market and

build credibility with that market. List your business's key features and characteristics, your competitive advantages and anything else that sets you apart from your competition. Using our Girls Compulsory example, you'll focus primarily on the objectives from your mission statement namely, safety, girls compulsory competition and championships.

Identify and Describe Your Target Market

Decide whether you want to target the entire gymnastics community or only a segment of it such as "six to ten year old girls." Include the key elements from your mission statement. The key elements from your mission statement were safety, children, girls, compulsory competition and championships. Find names that are suggestive of these elements. Don't limit yourself to real words, though. A coined name with no obvious meaning is a perfectly legitimate name provided it conveys something about your business. You will find coined names easier to trademark and secure website domain names for too. Let's use GymChamps for our example. Use tag lines that reinforce your mission statement. You could use something like: "GymChamps – *Midwest Level 6 champions since 2009*" or "GymChamps – *Teaching Safe Gymnastics First, Second and Always.*"

How to use your brand

Your logo is not your brand, but your logo should allow your brand to be instantly recognized by those familiar with it. To this extent, your logo helps create and reinforce brand awareness. The logo you create should be able to be used consistently in a variety of different media. It should be suitable for corporate letterhead and business cards, as well as for your website and any signs. You don't want a confusing mishmash of logos and banners and heaven knows what else. Everything you produce needs to use the same, consistent style of logo so that your logo becomes synonymous with your brand. Instant recognition is what you're going for, so don't dilute it by using several different logos for different purposes.

Establish consistent usage of your gym name, logo and tag line. Put the brand name and tagline together, the physical manifestation of your brand will be:

GymChamps

"We Create Champions in the Safest Gymnastics Training Center in the Midwest"

To establish brand awareness, this branding needs to be used consistently and frequently in everything you produce, whether that is letters to clients, business cards, brochures, invoices, advertising, promotions,

on your website, on the front door of your gym and on any personalized products you sell or give away. Also be consistent in your use of fonts and color schemes. These can be powerful in making your brand easily recognizable.

Once you've created your brand, you need to market and promote it, in addition to your regular services. This is how you establish your credibility and relevance to your customers and potential customer market. Hopefully you can see why your brand needs to be suggestive of your mission statement. If, at the same time as you're selling your programs and services you also push your brand, your brand becomes synonymous with your programs and services and vice versa.

How to Create Harmony

Tips to consider when integrating your story into your space:

1. **Visual Consistency:** Avoid the "tradeshow effect." That's where everything looks like a different design firm was in charge. Big mistake. Make a plan that will last a long time and stick to the plan.
2. **Color Palette:** Color speaks on many levels. A specialist can develop your color palette to communicate your core emotional outcomes.
3. **Keep It Simple:** Don't confuse anyone. We're already confused before we walk in your door. Give us some clarity. Don't try so hard. It will show if you do.
4. **Material Usage:** Be consistent in how you use materials to show your story. A disconnect between signage materials and promotional items is a disconnect from brand consistency. Be smart with this one.
5. **Graphic Design:** Graphic design prowess is very important in the age of visual sophistication. We all expect a visually dynamic environment wherever we go. Don't disappoint the audience. A branding design firm can lead you past the free "clip art" environment.

"Culture design" is as important as the equipment and the carpet in your gym. It is the art of this culture design to show your customers what is truly unique about your gym. A good design can help infuse your story into the very DNA of the gym. There's nothing worse than hanging your mission statement on the wall after you open. The wall itself should be the mission statement. That means *everything* in your building should be integrated to speak with one common visual voice.

The branding should be integrated into the palette and Web site design that truly gives the general public an

experience *before* they arrive. In time, signage, facility appearance, and print collateral will all work together to support awareness and marketing efforts.

Multiple Venue Imaging

When you have multiple venues that make up your business, a consistent brand plan for signing, interiors and retailing is critical to your overall success. In the age of electronic disconnection, the handheld digital media has its grip on us. The only way you can differentiate yourself is by creating a space that is truthful to the human spirit. Give your visitors and customers a reason to connect and they will come back again and again. Branding is the key.

Marketing with USA Gymnastics

Once you become a Member Club, you will have access to Marketing, Business, and Educational Benefits and Discounts and more. Using the branding materials on the Member Services website in your marketing is incredibly effective in portraying a professional image.

Communications Technology

Though most gyms are zooming down the technological super highway, many smaller gyms remain stuck in the slow lane. These professionals know the technology exists to take their gymnastics facilities from good to great, but many are hesitant when it comes to really embracing tools such as Social Media and the Internet and what they can do for productivity, revenue generation, and customer service. There are gyms everywhere still handling registrations, attendance, and security with paper forms, index cards, and three-ring binders.

Techno-savvy customers likely find the reluctance to "get wired" a bit irrational, but to well-seasoned managers with small staffs and aging computer hardware, adopting the new ways feels like a giant leap into the future. The change is simply too overwhelming. But in today's market, many "technophobes" are finding that clinging to old ways is becoming more and more of a hindrance. The generation now joining the work force has grown up with computers, bar-code scanners and surfing the Web - and today's budget-conscious "Amazon.com" consumers expect the convenience of things such as online registration, charge card payments, and instant communication.

Some gym owners might argue that technology is "too expensive" or "too complicated," but at this stage in the game that's no longer true. The positive side of arriving late to the table is that technology costs have come down, and the gymnastics industry now is well understood by those engineering today's latest software systems. In fact, by capitalizing on technology,

you might even save some money. Gym owners who embrace what's now available can streamline their jobs and boost customer satisfaction, thereby increasing their bottom lines.

But once you're there, it's vital to keep looking ahead. At many large gymnastics – fitness – youth sport venues, the time has never been better to embrace technology, and all gymnastics owners need to jump into the future or risk falling into the past. Here's a look at what you need to know to bring your facility up to date.

First, realize that technology should be consumed like a fine California wine: a little at a time. Evaluate your needs and start slowly by addressing the most essential. You might start by considering your overall computer software programs. In the past two decades, many software developers have tried to understand the nuances of the gymnastics business, and there isn't a gym owner around who hasn't purchased at least one bad program. Only the strongest software has survived, so there's now a better chance of getting it right.

To choose the best program for your operation, look at what works at facilities in similar communities. Fully investigate all the programs that potential providers have to offer. Prioritize the areas that will benefit your facility and phase in each of these programs accordingly. Be wary of any programs with modules still under construction.

The most critical choices you will likely have to make involve your registration procedures, customer identification process, and the bookkeeping software programs that will need to be integrated. For many, these three items must be the first priority, especially in gyms with small support staffs. Before purchasing anything, be sure you meet all statutory requirements for handling finances. Many banks require "wet signature" authorization of credit cards (no registrations over the phone), and are very sensitive to customer privacy.

Consider that many smaller gyms have found success by forming partnerships and sharing services. You could work with software companies and bulk-purchase with neighboring gyms to share training, technical, and support services. You also might reach out to local colleges and universities to help serve as the technical support for the program. One word of caution; if you

delegate the maintenance of any of your technology services to someone else be sure to retain control of usernames and passwords so that if you need to make a change, you aren't left scrambling to access your own services.

You'll be amazed at the potential increase in early revenue dollars when charge cards are introduced to your registration process — in some cases, more than 50 percent. Some traditional business owners may be concerned about processing and handling charges, but the savings in manpower, paper handling, and customer convenience should help cover any associated expenses. Some gyms are charging a small processing convenience fee for online registrations. It is still possible to negotiate with your bankers. In the current financial climate, bankers will likely be motivated to work with you when reminded that all of your business' money is deposited with them.

In addition, adding charge card capability will be a big plus in the public perception of the professionalism of your gym club. Guests will form an opinion of your service within minutes, and if they're forced to stand in line while your registration team fumbles with lists, checks ID's and attempts to answer questions, you're already starting off negatively. Place a true value on membership and regular attendance, and improve customer service exponentially. In addition, the savings on office personnel for processes that can be electronically updated and last for years will certainly help the bottom line.

With today's shrinking budgets and smaller staffs, online registration programs with 24/7 access are a saving grace. The latest user-friendly online registration programs can accommodate waiting lists, age and residency restrictions, as well as payment plans. In addition to the obvious advantages, enabling residents to register or purchase services online may eliminate the need for late office hours or weekend registration staff and reduces last-minute lines.

When it comes to setting up online registration capability, be sure your software provider understands the nuances of your programs and don't let concerns about transition time scare you. Most systems can be set up quickly and because users establish their own data, gone are the days of data entry that were a part of programs past. Once you have online registration in



place, just set the timer to allow enrollment to begin, sit back and watch. It's amazing how many people will be up at night, registering in their pajamas.

Easy access to data on your customer base provides great opportunities for marketing and promotion. With a few clicks of the mouse, you can substantially cut your budget for newspaper ads, fliers and similar marketing approaches. Things such as online newsletters, target marketing, registration reminders and other creative uses of e-mail enable you to easily provide savvy customer service. And by cutting down on paper, you'll be more eco-friendly. To optimize your use of e-marketing, do not purchase a computer registration program that does not allow for e-commerce.

In the July 2009 edition of the USA Gymnastics Technique, Loree Galimore and Kay Leonard presented an excellent summary of modern social media. The authors briefly describe the types and benefits of a variety of social media services (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.). A major problem with many of these programs is the high maintenance and the time required to keep the content current and relevant. I think it is great to have a Facebook presence for your gym and have a few interesting YouTube videos posted, but my opinion is that a good regular blog with valuable information is the easiest way to provide added value to your website (and to your customers). A favorite communication tool is ConstantContact - a high-quality, very low-cost "push" newsletter that you can send to your customers as often (or as little) as you like. A professional e-newsletter sent quarterly to your customers communicates upcoming events and presents your image in a positive light. Remember, sending too many e-mail blasts makes you a pest, but the right reminders to the right audience can make you a hero. Pick and choose your e-mail blasts carefully. Again, remember to protect your user database to ensure security and privacy for your customers. If a customer "opts-out" of receiving your emails, make sure to remove their email from your database to comply with their wishes.

Busy families are juggling lots of priorities, and cell phones; iPads and laptops probably are a way of life for many of your patrons. For that reason, providing free Wi-Fi access — perhaps in your pro shop, snack bar, or observation area — will not only make your registration program hum in several locations of your facility, but provide a fabulous, convenient service for your guests. Parents will be able to work while waiting for their children, and guests who usually work at home now can spend time at the community gym and still get some business done. Siblings or gymnasts waiting for

practice to begin will be able to complete homework assignments that require Internet access. When going Wi-Fi at your facility, remember to also provide power outlets for cell phone and computer charging. Market the service to promote membership and paint a picture of an accommodating facility that understands its members. Your staff will appreciate the Wi-Fi access as well, so establish policies for use early.

Social Media Marketing

Up until 1992 government policies prohibited using the Internet for commercial purpose (the network was funded, and development was overseen, by the National Science Foundation). Oh, how things have changed! In 1994, I wrote an article encouraging gym owners to get on board the new marketing opportunity called the World Wide Web. USA Gymnastics went "online" in February 1996 with their first website. Today, almost all companies can derive some benefits from social media. I see more and more gymnastics centers appearing on Facebook, though many are still making little headway in getting the most out of this phenomenon. Ultimately, gymnastics is a business of trust and interpersonal relationships. The teachers, facility, and programs matter, of course, but building loyalty can be just as important.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines social media as "Forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos). Some examples of current social media include: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, SnapChat, Pinterest, Instagram, Blogs, and Text Messaging.

- 72% of all Internet users are now active on social media. 42% of online adults use multiple social media platforms. 23% of users log on at least 5 times per day. 1 out of every 7 minutes spent online is spent on Facebook.
- If Facebook were a country, it would be the 3rd largest country in the world with 600 million users and over 1.28 billion monthly active users. 300 million pictures are uploaded to Facebook everyday. 22% of employees visit social networking sites 5 or more times per week; many admit to logging in while at work.
- Twitter has 255 million monthly active users. 78% of active users are on mobile and 46% of users tweet at least once per day. 750 tweets are shared every second, with 500 million tweets per day. 62% of users are in the 18-34 age group.

- 1 of every 3 college students and young employees regard the Internet as important as air, water, food, and shelter. 2 of every 5 college students and young employees said they would accept a lower-paying job that offered more flexibility as to device choice, social media access, & mobility than a higher-paying job with less flexibility.

Obviously, social media is a tremendous force in modern society. Along those lines, there are some best practices for gym owners looking to hop on the social media marketing bandwagon.

Create dialogue. Successful social media campaigns involve identifying core constituents and engaging them. Gym owners can leverage social networks like Facebook and Twitter to connect with – rather than communicate at – customers. Making customer interactions feel more personal can significantly enhance loyalty and boost retention rates. Social media makes it easy to let others do your promotion for you. Remember: social media’s first name is SOCIAL. Engage your community.

Build communities, not databases. It’s not only about collecting information about customers. It’s about creating communities of influencers and brand ambassadors who can help spread your brand messaging to their online friends and followers.

Use social media to gain customer insight. Social media tools allow companies to tap into customer sentiment like never before, revealing important customer concerns related to the industry, competition or the company itself. This can ultimately help gym owners improve service quality or spot market opportunities.

Promote testimonies. Peer influence is 10 times greater than advertising. It’s called social media for a reason – don’t be afraid to promote word-of-mouth from happy parents. When the message comes from an objective third party, it can be much more effective.

Spread knowledge to decrease risk. Social media allows people to gather information in digestible “bytes,” creating more informed clients. Gyms can use social media to disseminate important knowledge like membership updates, policy changes and schedule alerts faster. As an added bonus, you also will not have to print, publish, and reprint brochures and pamphlets.

Finally, before you begin your social media marketing, be sure to establish a Social Media Policy for your gym to help you limit liability, prevent the loss of productivity, permit effective and legally compliant monitoring, to protect against discrimination, harassment, and cyber-bullying, and to guard against suits for invasion of

privacy, defamation, improper recruiting and improper discipline and termination. Remember that employee posts live forever. Identify what conduct is permitted. Identify prohibited uses of the covered systems and devices (the use of gym computers).

Identify the gym’s legitimate interests. Policy should clearly express that there is no privacy when using any part of the employer’s computer system. Be consistent with organization’s policies and procedures. Reserve the right to monitor and review content of electronic communications sent or received on or through work system or devices, as well as Internet use. Provide mandatory training, and notify employees that any violation will result in discipline, up to and including termination.

There are risks associated with social media, but don’t let that keep you from using this valuable marketing tool.

Press Releases

While print media is much less influential that it was ten years ago, many communities still have local print newspapers that are still very popular and widely read. There are two situations that will bring a news reporter to your gym – a special interest opportunity or a tragedy. Dealing with the media in either situation can be difficult to handle appropriately. You certainly won’t have the same questions asked of you in these two scenarios but in each case you should be well prepared and make the best of it. How you present yourself to the media can be a tremendous boost to your business or absolutely destroy it. The goal of a gym owner is “welcome news” and trying to get your organization some positive notice by the media.

If you have ever submitted a “press release” to your local newspaper and been disappointed when you got no response, rest assured you are not alone. A lot of gym owners think that every Level 6 State champion or Regional team qualifier in their gym should receive feature coverage. Your newspaper or TV news editor may not agree. A few things to keep in mind can help you promote your program:

- **Timing** - Consider what is happening in your community and how it relates to the news business. If there is a lot going on, the competition for space may limit your chances of getting published. Your press release may get lost in the shuffle of a busy news week.
- **Trends** - Is there a hot new fad that is getting a lot of attention lately? Are you riding that wave and deserve a little recognition for your contribution to the cool lifestyle?

- **Tie-Ins** - National Gymnastics Day provides a great chance to get some exposure. State, National, Regional or World Championships may provide you opportunities to tie into these major events. Is there a community event that you can be a part of that would put you in front of the public eye? Public service events like Cancer Cartwheel-A-Thons and volunteer service activities are always good for added exposure.
- **Tags** - People that make your business special – your employees or your customers can give you a chance to tag into their notoriety. Do you have a staff member that has another interesting side to their life? Can you tag onto an announcement about your gym hosting a USA Gymnastics University Safety Certification Workshop and expand to include additional details about your program? Are there any celebrities (local, regional, national) in your program that would allow you to use them as endorsement figures? Testimonials are very well received.

Don't be afraid to engage in a little self-promotion. If you don't believe enough in your business to tell other people how great you are, nobody else will. When writing and submitting a press release, a few tips may get you moved up the priority list. Make sure your announcements are:

- **Correct** - Double check to make sure that your information is 100% accurate.
- **Brief** – Sometime shorter is better, as many newspapers receive hundreds of announcements, letters and releases a day, so you will have more chance to get published. Focus on one major topic. Also make your main point as early on in the release as possible, as editors will tend to cut a story if they are running short of space.
- **Clear** – Your press release must make sense. Remember that while you may know a great deal about gymnastics, not all editors or newspaper readers will.
- **Personal** - You are more likely to be published if the release contains personal knowledge, interest or experience. Provide photographs if possible.
- **Complete** – Make the reporter/editor's job as easy as possible. Provide them with written (typed, double spaced) copy and digital copy (on disk or via e-mail) as well. Always include your contact details; name, address, phone numbers, website, e-mail address. Make yourself available to be interviewed.
- **Photographs** – Many community newspapers lack a full time professional photographer, but gladly

accept photographs submitted with a news release or human-interest story.

If the opportunity presents itself to engage in positive publicity, take it for all it's worth. Be prepared with ready answers to probable questions and a couple of choice sound bytes that will look good in the paper or sound good when quoted.

Issuing a media press release is a quick and easy way for your gym to garner media coverage and exposure. There is some truth to the axiom that there is no such thing as bad publicity. Whether a press release to your local newspaper, an announcement for your favorite radio or cable television station, or internal newsletter article, constantly look for opportunities to put yourself out in front of the media.

Announcing company news, such as a new instructor, class, equipment, event, or location, is one of the tactics used to help generate media attention, which can result in increased enrollment. The distribution of a press release is one way to target and attract the media to help secure positive publicity for the gym.

The purpose of a press release is to provide the media with pertinent information that will encourage reporters to make contact and schedule a follow-up interview to obtain additional information for a story. Therefore, it is important to include the industry standard who, what, when, where, why and how within the content of the release.

All releases should be formatted with the following key elements:

- Company letterhead – establishes legitimacy to the release
- Contact information – provide name, phone number, website address, and e-mail address for easy follow-up
- Headline – gets to the point of the release; shorter is better
- Dateline – includes the date and location of the release; establishes timeliness
- Pages – use double spacing for easy reading; no more than two pages in length
- Boilerplate – use at the end of the release to provide a brief company description

There is a formula to writing a release, which includes:

- Inverted pyramid – place the most important information at the beginning and the least important at the end

- Write tightly – avoid using too many words and stick to the facts (remember that if you can't prove what you state, it is only bragging)
- Audience – remember who your audience is and write using a straightforward style
- Testimonials – including a quote from a satisfied customer, student, or gym owner increases the chances that information from the release will be published or broadcast
- Correct spelling, proper grammar and punctuation – ask someone to double check your work because the contents of the release are a direct reflection on your company; two sets of eyes are better than one in spotting inaccuracies

The most important parts of the process are distributing the release to the appropriate media for your specific news and identifying the proper editors and/or reporters to send the release to. Do some research to determine which source will provide the greatest exposure, while also reaching your target audience. Follow up with the editors and/or reporters after distribution through a phone call or e-mail to complete the process. This is also a great opportunity to ask editors or reporters what kind of stories would be of interest to them and their readers.

Keep in mind that an effective media release should be newsworthy, direct and timely in order to capture the attention of the media – It is one significant piece of an overall media relations strategy.

Annual Program Review

It is a best practice each year to review the previous year and plan for anticipated changes for the next twelve months. You want more students and higher profits in the next fiscal year. Your mind is racing with clever promotional schemes and innovative marketing ideas to take advantage of the "Olympic Rush" and attract new customers in the coming year. That is all good and fine, but what are all those new students going to experience?

The surest way to sustain growth in your gym year to year is to get your employees to work as hard as you do. If they are content to perform the minimum daily requirement, fly below your radar, and avoid getting fired until they get a better job, no amount you spend on marketing and branding will move your gym forward. Follow leadership best practices to increase employee engagement along your front lines, and you'll see a significant improvement to your bottom line.

You do not need to create more rules and policies to get your staff to work harder and stay longer. In reality, the opposite is true – fewer common sense rules may be better than more rules. Most workers don't respond favorably to more restrictions or harsher penalties when they sit down during class or violate your customer service rules; in fact, they'll rebel stronger against those policies they see as pointless. That means you need to transition from creating more rules to establishing better rules. And better rules are always marked by clarity and relevance.

Review your employee manual and mark only those rules, policies, and procedures that are foundational to the success of your operation and that you are actually prepared to enforce. Everything that does not get selected should be eliminated. Every item that remains should be expressed in crystal-clear terms that even a 5th grader can understand. Simplicity and clarity trump jargon and business-speak.

Next, go back to page 1 and review the policies to include rationale of why it is essential to the success of your business, and, whenever possible, why it ultimately benefits employees. If you demand more than occasional compliance to your company rules, keep your rulebook tight and light, and take steps to assure that each policy is seen from the employee's perspective as relevant and important to their success and the success of your business. Although it's not easily doable, attempt to create the kind of employee handbook that a part time employee could memorize.

Getting your team to march in step toward the same goal can't be accomplished by creating a great handbook; it's a process that must be woven into your daily mentorship. One quick recital of your company policies during training will not cement them in the minds of your employees. Tell, then sell, then lead by example.

Nowhere is the culture of an organization more in full view of the customer than along the organization's frontline; the precious six feet of attitude that are projected between the nose of the employee and the nose of the customer. To achieve and maintain a healthy vibrant attitude throughout your organization's culture requires leaders to consistently eliminate the negative and to accentuate the positive.

Eliminate – Enter the gym through the back door and see your operation from your employees' perspectives. Does your messaging read like it was sent down from the principal's office? There's a big difference between a sign on the employee entrance that says, "All Employees Must Park in the Back Lot" and one that

says, "Our Customers Pay Our Wages, So Let's Save the Closest Parking for Them." Carefully edit the negative language and overtones out of employee e-mail, notices, and other forms of communication, and look for creative ways to present them in a more positive way. Take steps to remove the drab and dreary signs, colors, and old equipment that have a way of infesting back areas of the gym. Managers often allow this to happen because "employees are the only ones exposed to it." You can't isolate your staff members from all the negativity that surrounds them, but you can take steps to remove some of the nastiness from your workplace.

Accentuate – Your staff needs continual exposure to positive attitudes in your workplace. This requires they be placed into situations where they can shadow your most enthusiastic and positive people and those they have minimum exposure to chronic complainers. Additionally, be on the lookout for those glimpses of the attitude you're trying to instill in your people, and be prepared to call attention to it as it happens. Further, talk to your people about the good things that are happening throughout your business. If you can't share positive news about your business, shine the light on something good that's taking place in your community, the gymnastics industry, or the world. Make it your mission to be a purveyor of good tidings. Go out of your way to be the beacon of light when everything else they may be exposed to drags them down.

Every gym owner appears to be fixated on capturing customer feedback, and many offer discounts and incentives to patrons who participate in online or call-in surveys. You could really learn a lot by sitting in the viewing area and listening to the parents, but if you really want to know what's going on in your business, ask the people who are teaching your classes and answering your phones, manning your front lines and serving the customers you're attempting to WOW. If you really want to know what the biggest problems are in your organization, ask your employees. Want to know how to improve sales and service? Ask and listen to your employees. Need ideas to stay ahead of your competitors? Ask and listen to your employees. Try enclosing a simple 3-question survey in every employee's paycheck and provide a method for anonymous feedback. Employees can be asked, "What do you like about working here?" "What would make you work harder and stay longer?" "What ideas do you have for improving our programs, classes, and pro shop sales?" Your people aren't your problem; they're the solution. Tap their brains and you'll see them throw their hearts into your business – just like you do.

Dealing with Mistakes

Everybody makes mistakes. Every coach understands that mistakes are part of the learning process. When teaching your gymnasts new skills, you know that mistakes are inevitable. Staying safe and overcoming the mistakes to learn the skill is the ultimate goal but learning how to deal with mistakes is an important lesson in itself. Business leaders also need to learn how to respond to mistakes.

There are two ways to deal with mistakes: positively or negatively. People with negative responses take a victim stance, seeing a continuous succession of problems and a process of problems and troubles. They don't expect a lot and they typically don't get much or make excuses and lay blame. When things go wrong, they shrug their shoulders and passively accept that this is the way life is and there isn't anything they can do to make it better.

On the other hand, people with a positive response see the opportunities and possibilities. They approach their response with optimism, cheerfulness, and a general attitude of positive expectations. They expect a lot and they are seldom disappointed.

As a result, people with a positive response are able to deal constructively and effectively with mistakes and temporary setbacks. When you develop the skill of learning from your mistakes, you are the kind of person who welcomes obstacles and setbacks as opportunities to flex your mental muscles and move ahead. You look at problems as rungs on the ladder of success that you grab onto as you pull your way higher just as our gymnasts build from their mistakes and progress to new skills.

Two of the most common ways to handle mistakes are invariably fatal to high achievement. The first common but misguided way to handle a mistake is the failure to accept it when it occurs. According to Harvard Business Review statistics, 70 percent of all decisions we make will be wrong. That's an average. This means that some people will fail more than 70 percent of the time, and some people will fail less. It is hard to believe that most of the decisions we make could turn out to be wrong in some way. In fact, if this is the case, how can we continue to function at all?

The fact is that our society, our families, our businesses, and our relationships continue to survive and thrive because intelligent people tend to cut their losses and minimize their mistakes. It is only when people refuse to accept that they have made a bad choice or decision—and prolong the consequences by

sticking to that bad choice or decision—that mistakes become extremely expensive and harmful.

The quality of “intellectual honesty” is one of the most respected qualities possessed by individuals, especially leaders. When you are intellectually honest, you deal with your circumstances as facts and realities, rather than hoping, wishing, and praying that they could be different. The minute you begin to deal straightforwardly with life, you become a far more positive, creative, and constructive person. You become far more effective in overcoming your obstacles and achieving your goals.

Learning from your mistakes is an essential skill that enables you to develop the resilience to be a master of change rather than a victim of change. The person who recognizes that they have made a mistake and changes direction the fastest is the one who will win in an age of increasing information, technology and competition. By remaining fast on your feet, you will be able to out-play and out-position your competition.

Approach every mistake you make as a special learning experience, one to teach you something valuable and necessary for your success in the future. Become an “inverse paranoid,” a person who is convinced that there is a vast conspiracy in the world to make you successful. Play with the idea that there are a series of circumstances out there working on your behalf. These circumstances are “learning experiences” to enable you to grow as a person so that you can reach and achieve the great heights that are meant for you.

Whenever something happens of an adverse nature, immediately counteract your natural tendency toward disappointment and frustration by saying, “That’s good!” Then, get busy looking into the situation to find out what is genuinely good about it.

Every day, all day long, you have problems in your work. In fact, if the problems did not exist, your job would not exist either. A powerful way to change your thinking is to realize that solving problems is what you are paid to

do. Your job is to be a problem-solver, no matter what your title might be. All day long, you deal with problems and mistakes – coaches’ correct performance mistakes caused by their athletes, you deal with mistakes made by staff and customers. The more mistakes you can spot and redirect before the consequences are felt, the more valuable you will become and the more you will benefit.

In both your personal and professional life, there are seven best practice steps you can take to deal with almost any mistake you make.

- The first step is to approach the mistake with a positive, constructive frame of mind, using the techniques outlined above.
- The second step is to define the mistake clearly. Exactly what happened? Write it down. Think on paper. The more clearly you can write about it, the more clearly you will understand the mistake and its possible corrections.
- The third step is to examine all the known causes of the mistake. How did it happen? Why did it happen? What were the critical variables that triggered the mistake? Any attempt to pass over a mistake without identifying how it occurred in the first place will leave the roots of that mistake in the ground, to grow up again in the future.
- The fourth step is to identify all the possible ways of mitigating the mistake. What are all the different things that you could do to minimize the cost of the mistake, or to solve the problem that has arisen? The more ideas you have, the more likely it is that you will come up with the approach that will prove most effective.
- The fifth step is for you to make a clear, unequivocal decision about how to handle the mistake. Decisiveness is a character trait of high performing individuals. Almost any decision is better than no decision at all. Even the most effective leaders make mistakes, but then they quickly make decisions to offset those.

- The sixth step is to assign specific responsibility for taking the steps necessary to mitigate the mistake within a certain time frame. Who *exactly* is going to do what, and when, and how, and to whom will they report? The failure to assign or accept responsibility to achieve results before a specific deadline will leave the situation open-ended, and it will often get worse as a result.
- Finally, the seventh step in dealing with mistakes is to take action. Intense action orientation is a characteristic of the top two percent of the population.

The only guarantee in life (OK, aside from death and taxes) is that most of the decisions you make

and conclusions you come to will eventually prove wrong. How you deal with these situations is the chief determinant of your success or failure.

Mistakes and problems are good. Without them there would be no opportunities for greatness. When you take every challenge that life throws at you, accepting it as an inevitable part of the growing experience, you can turn it to your advantage in every way possible. Almost every mistake you make contains a hidden treasure that you can apply to your life to forge a future that is extraordinary and worthwhile.

Key Points

- Focusing on successful programming and eliminating unprofitable activities provides the gym with increased cash flow. Expanding programs gives the gym more opportunities for revenues. Providing the programs that the community desires ensures a profitable, growing business.
- Maintaining a clean, safe, and attractive facility with good equipment creates an environment that is inviting to the public and makes customers want to return. A good aesthetic is important to the image of success that relates to profitability.
- Charging the “correct” fees will often be the difference between success and failure. A gym owner should avoid being a low cost program because people will perceive the quality of your quality as low. Do you really want to be seen as the Wal-Mart of gymnastics clubs?
- Expanding a gym business can mean many things; adding another location, adding new programs, diversifying with new activities, etc. Growing a business in this manner creates excitement and draws attention (new and improved!), aiding marketing efforts.
- A significant factor in developing business is branding. Branding is your business identity. Your brand tells your customers what they can expect from your business. A brand should be an all-inclusive message about who, what, where, how, and why your gym is different from every other gymnastics center.
- Marketing is much more than advertising. Using your brand as the foundation, use every means possible to communicate your strategic message – via print, visual, and social media.

BECOME A USA GYMNASTICS MEMBER CLUB

WHY TEAM UP WITH USA GYMNASTICS?

**ACCESS TO UTILIZE THE USA GYMNASTICS
LOGO AND BRAND IDENTITY**

**CONNECTION WITH THE MOST
RECOGNIZABLE BRAND IN THE SPORT**

**ABILITY TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CLUB'S
CREDIBILITY**

**AFFILIATION WITH A PROMINENT AND
PROFESSIONAL INDUSTRY LEADER**

**ENTITLEMENT OF YOUR MEET AS A USA
GYMNASTICS SANCTIONED EVENT**





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APPENDIX



Legal Planning

- [Sample Buy-Sell Agreement](#)
- [Sample Partnership Agreement](#)

Business Planning

- [Business Plan Outline](#)
- [Action Planning Worksheet](#)

Financial Planning

- [Break Even Analysis Worksheet](#)
- [Cash Flow Projection Worksheet](#)
- [Equipment and Apparatus Inventory Depreciation Schedule](#)
- [Equipment and Apparatus Inventory Replacement Schedule](#)
- [Profit-Loss Forecast Worksheet](#)
- [New Program Budget Worksheet](#)
- [Various IRS Tax Forms](#)

Human Resources

- [360-degree Performance Review Form](#)
- [Anti-Harassment Policy](#)
- [At-Will Employment Acknowledgement](#)
- [Daily Time Record](#)
- [Drug Free Workplace Policy](#)
- [Employee Code of Conduct](#)
- [Employee Emergency Notification Form](#)
- [Exit Interview](#)
- [Orientation Checklist](#)
- [Employee Satisfaction Form](#)
- [Employee Satisfaction Survey](#)
- [Warning Notice](#)
- [Severance Agreement](#)
- [Independent Contractor Agreement](#)
- [Mandated Reporter Acknowledgement](#)
- [Performance Planning Worksheet](#)
- [Receipt of Employee Guidebook](#)
- [Receipt of Key](#)

- [Receipt of Uniform](#)
- [Supervisor Performance Evaluation](#)
- [Teacher Observation](#)
- [Technology Policy](#)
- [Time Off Policy](#)
- [Violence Prevention Policy](#)

Operations

- [Activity Sign-In Sheet](#)
- [Class Attendance Form](#)
- [Complaint Feedback Form](#)
- [Compliment Feedback Form](#)
- [Contagious Disease Exposure Notice](#)
- [Customer Service Policy](#)
- [Key / Equipment Check Out Log](#)
- [Lesson Planning Worksheet](#)
- [Maintenance Request Form](#)
- [Medical History and Waiver Form](#)
- [Meeting Sign-In Form](#)
- [Program Evaluation Survey](#)
- [Refund and Transfer Request Form](#)
- [Student Health Record](#)
- [Suggestion Form](#)
- [Telephone Log](#)

Risk Management

- [Emergency Action Plan](#)
- [Equipment and Apparatus Warranty Tracker](#)
- [Equipment and Facility Inspection Form](#)
- [Incident Log](#)
- [Incident Report Form](#)
- [Risk Evaluation Report Card template](#)
- [Roof Inspection Checklist](#)
- [Waiver and Medical History Form](#)
- [Gymnastics Best Practices Self – Evaluation Report Card](#)



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USA GYMNASTICS.

JOIN THE TEAM!

**Begin Here by being a Member Club
and let USA Gymnastics take you anywhere!**

**Member Club memberships align with the competitive season.
The professional, instructor, and athlete memberships are valid
August 1 – July 31 each year.**

WHY team up with USA Gymnastics?

- As a Member Club, you get access to our one of a kind benefit package
- Access to utilize the USA Gymnastics logo and brand identity
- Connection with the most recognizable brand in the sport
- Ability to strengthen your club's credibility
- Invaluable visibility and free advertisement for your gym
- Affiliation with a prominent and professional industry leader
- Entitlement of your meet as a USA Gymnastics Sanctioned Event.

HOW your club can team up with USA Gymnastics

Ways to use our Member Club logo

- Place on your web site
- In your newsletters
- In your email communications
- On your handouts
- At your sanctioned events
- Place the USA Gymnastics Member Club logo on your social media outlets

Action steps

- Post your Member Club banner in your gym for everyone to see
- Place the window decal on the entrance doors of your gym
- Visit the National Gymnastics Day website for ideas on how you can get involved this year
- Download the National Gymnastics Day logo and start planning!
- Download the free commercials to your website, promoting grassroots gymnastics

Read the brand guidelines to make sure you are using the logo correctly.

- Visit the Member Club Only site and check out the resource page with fabulous handouts to customize with your gyms logo and information.

Are you using the correct USA Gymnastics Logo?

There are several places you should use the USA Gymnastics Member Club logo: Website, Emails, Newsletters, Club brochure, Banners, Flyers, Sanctioned event information, on gym walls, and Team Uniforms.



Please make sure you're using the correct logo! The logo(s) you're using should have the correct color, shape, and font style. The logo you're using should also always indicate 'Member Club'. Visit the Members Section of usagym.org for brand guidelines.



If you have any questions please contact Member Services at 800.345.4719 or membership@usagym.org