



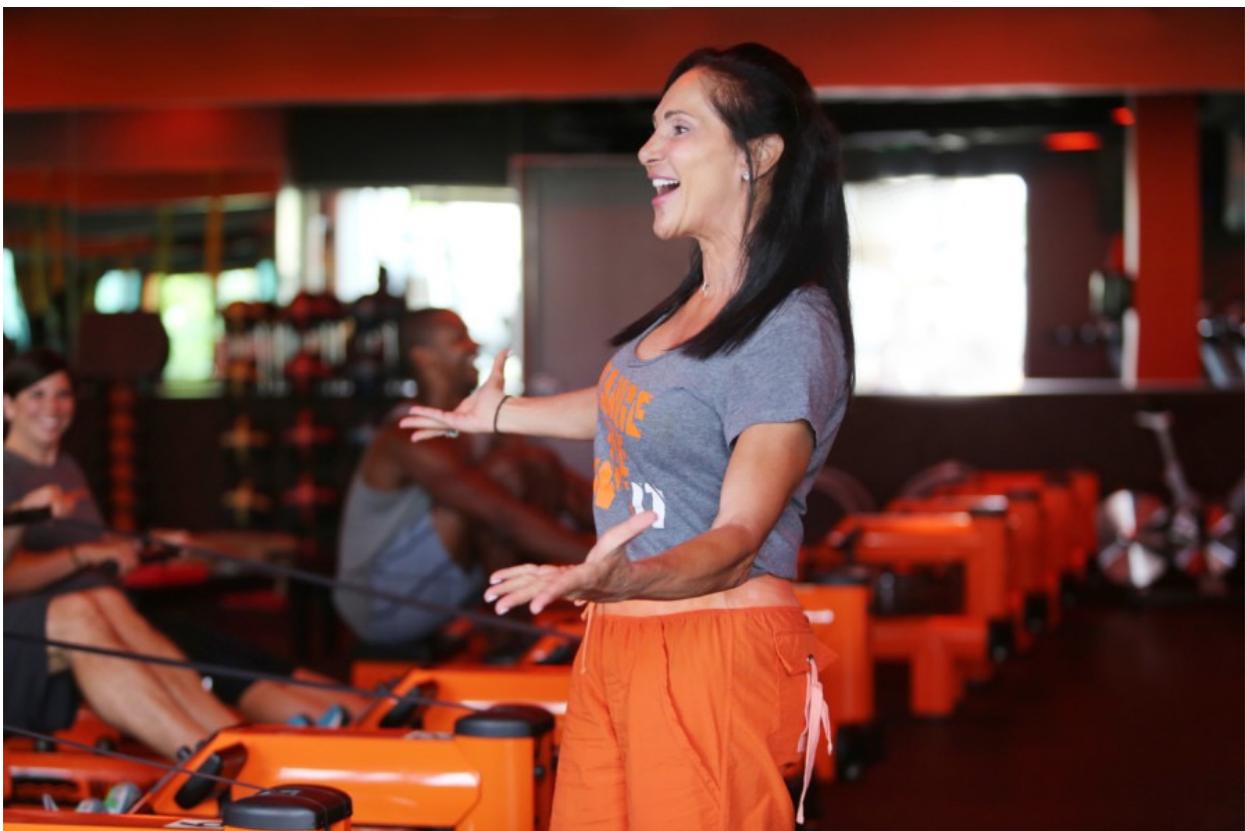
THESE are the Things Personal Trainers Want You to Know

Andrea Williams

In just a few short weeks, everyone's focus will shift from cocktail-filled holiday parties and decadent desserts to New Year's resolutions and, inevitably, the desire to drop a few pounds. In fact, according to a [Nielson poll](#), the top two resolutions for 2015 were to "stay fit and healthy" and to "lose weight."

While there are certainly plenty of ways to get fit these days — whether your preference is to hit the pavement and walk (or run) off the pounds, or sweat it out in the comfort of your own living room with a streaming workout or DVD — the fact remains that one of the best ways to get results quickly is to hire a trainer. The saying goes that if Michael Jordan needed a coach, you probably do too, and in no area of life is that more true than health and fitness — an area that many of us have struggled with for years.

According the [U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#), there are nearly 300,000 trainers in the United States, so you obviously can't assume that the first trainer who offers his or her services will be the best fit. After all, your trainer choice can mean the difference between achieving massive health gains or heading into the summer months still afraid to try on that two-piece. Here's how to choose the right personal trainer for you!



Before you hire a personal trainer, make sure you're asking the right questions.
(Image: Ellen Latham, of Orange Theory, from her [FACES interview](#).)

Key Questions to Ask a Personal Trainer *Before* You Get Started

What are your certifications?

You wouldn't let a doctor without a medical license perform surgery on you, and you probably only trust a certified accountant to file your yearly taxes. Likewise, it's important to choose a trainer with the appropriate certifications. The problem, says Mike Kneuer, personal trainer and founder of [ipersonaltrainonline.com](#), is that the personal training industry isn't regulated, so there are a lot of sketchy certifications available that actually hold very little value.

"You should look for certifications from the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), the National Federation of Professional Trainers (NFPT), the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), the American Council on Exercise (ACE) or the International Sports Sciences Association (ISSA)," he explains. "Those are some of the most reputable certifications in the industry. Also, aside from just their CPT (certified personal trainer) certificate, you should also ask if they have any specialty certifications or have taken courses in nutrition or corrective exercise, or if they have any sport-specific certifications."

Can you help me reach my goals? And can I check your references?

Whether you're looking to get toned, to trim down, to bulk up or any/all of the above, you want to be sure you're working with someone who can help you achieve your goals. As such, Liz Hilliard, founder of [Hilliard Studio Method](#) in Charlotte, NC, says, "You want to look for a trainer who has a history of success and growth in their field." Ask for references of clients who had similar goals, give them a call and learn about their experience with the trainer.

Do you have any experiences training someone with my specific needs?

A personal training certification does not equip one trainer to be all things to all clients. "If the trainer's experiences consist primarily of working with highly fit people or people who are getting ready for some sort of competition/sports event, this may not be the right fit for someone who is rehabilitating an injury, trying to stay fit during a pregnancy or someone who is elderly or deconditioned," says Lauren Eirk at [Yoga Integrated Science](#) in

Louisville. “If the trainer has, in fact, worked with someone who has a similar condition, it might be a good idea to request a reference from a former client who has experienced this training.”

What’s your training style (personality and exercise, yoga, etc.)?

This question is actually two-fold. First, you need to find out if your trainer takes a laid-back, more mellow approach to training, if they have an in-your-face, bootcamp style, or if they fall somewhere in between. Ultimately, this will help you determine if your personality meshes with the trainer’s, and whether you’ll be able to work with him long enough to see results.

Second, says Keith Sparks, a functional chiropractor and owner of **ICT Muscle and Joint Clinic** in Wichita, KS, it is important to determine the trainer’s primary training focus. “Not all trainers practice similarly and many will emphasize different approaches,” he explains. “Some personal trainers will focus on weight loss first and foremost, while other trainers will program around injury prevention. Understanding what your goals are and the trainer’s approach will help identify whether he or she matches your philosophy.”

Can I see sample programs?

Personal training is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, and it’s important that your prospective trainer be able to show you a sample program that will directly address your specific needs and concerns.

“Training for fat loss, strength and muscle building requires different techniques and strategies — you can’t use one program to achieve all three goals,” says David Labentowicz, founder of **Elite Edge Athletic and Personal Training**. “Any personal trainer worth paying money for designs programs and plans for their clients and, most importantly, tracks their progress. Tracking progress lets you know if you’re getting better — otherwise, you’d just be guessing.”

Red Flags to Watch For

Not seeing results

“If you feel like you are not seeing the results you want on a continuous basis or feel that the trainer does not understand your personal goals, then it might be time to look for another trainer,” shares Clary Hilliard Gray. “At Hilliard Studio Method we value that all of our trainers are in tune to each client’s level, what they want to achieve and are consistently pushing them to their edge.”



If you're not getting the results you're looking for, it's time to find a new trainer.
(Image: [Wanda Koch Photography](#) at Hilliard Studio Method)

A trainer who doesn't listen to the client's needs or keep training session records.

“Trainers who just jump right into exercise without learning about their client on a daily basis are practicing borderline malpractice,” says Lauren Eirk, a trainer at [Yoga Integrated Science](#) in Louisville. “Client evaluation should be an ongoing practice. Although not all certifications are the same, it is important that the trainer has had enough education to be able to train an individual as well as liability insurance. The trainer should be consistently working on their education and staying up-to-date with current research in their field.”



If you're more of a yoga gal, and your trainer is more into HIIT, that could be a problem ...

You can't talk to the trainer's past clients

You shouldn't just take a trainer at her word if she says she is the best in the biz. She should be willing to introduce you to former clients or provide testimonials that corroborate her claims. "The best coaches and trainers get their clients by word of mouth," says Tim Blake, owner and founder of [SuperFitDads.com](https://www.superfitdads.com). "After all, when people get awesome results, they tend to tell their friends — and anyone else who will listen. A competent trainer will only be too happy for you to talk with them."

It is important to note, however, that you should be seeking positive testimonials from people who had similar goals and achieved the results you desire. As an example, if your goal is to get ripped for fitness competitions, hearing from a former client who successfully lost 75 pounds won't mean much.

The trainer only has long-term clients

While your primary purpose in hiring a trainer is likely to get big results quickly, it's also important to find a trainer who can equip you to ultimately achieve results on your own. So if a prospective trainer typically works with the same client for a year-plus, that's probably a red flag.

“Personal trainers are expensive, and most people cannot afford one for a long time — that's why a trainer's goal should always be to educate you so that you can work out on your own in the future,” says Alex Haschen of [Verto Fitness](#). “Trainers will always inflate the time that their clients stick around because they want the income; just make sure you ask questions and learn about what your trainer is teaching you so that you can start to move away from instruction one day.”

The trainer doesn't practice what he preaches

Is it shallow to judge a trainer's competency based on his physique? Kneuer doesn't think so.

“As a trainer, my body is my best business card,” Kneuer says. “People want to train with someone who has a physique that proves he walks the walk and lives the lifestyle he preaches. [Training with] an obese trainer is like going to a doctor who smokes.”

Tim Blake agrees. “To coach something effectively — whether it's strength gain, fat loss or anything else — you should have at least gone through the process yourself,” he says. “We wouldn't take skiing lessons from an instructor who can't make it down the bunny slopes, so why hire a trainer who's never been lean or strong to help us get in the best shape of our life? Theory has its place, but there's no substitute for practical experience.”