

Who is responsible for the quality your staff?

2010 Australian Fitness Industry Survey brought to you by Ezypay will again provide club owners and managers of Australian fitness clubs with the insights into club operations, staffing, sales, marketing and finance along with the thoughts feeling and perceptions of the members of their clubs.

To provide additional guidance and direction this year Ezypay invited a panel of leading industry professionals to discuss some of the major outcomes from this year's survey results. The AFIS expert panel included;

Grant Gamble (GG)	Owner – Bodywise
Justin Wilshaw (JW)	CEO – Contours
Gayle Brimble (GB)	Training Team Captain – Australian Institute Fitness
Megan Crow (MC)	Business Advisor - Christchurch City Council, NZ
Jamie Hayes (JH)	Managing Director - Healthy Inspirations
Edel Kilmartin (EK)	Director of Operations - Curves
Justin Tamsett (JT)	CEO - Active Management
Simon Hall (SH)	Marketing Manager - Ezypay
Celeste Kirby-Brown (CKB)	Sales & Marketing Director – Ezypay

Survey outcomes - Finding good staff (29%) is once again a major concern at a club level, and finding quality staff (53%) a concern at an industry level.

Question - Who is responsible for the quality of the staff?

SH We emphasised this point quite heavily in last year's survey but this year it's becoming more evident that finding quality staff has overtaken the PPCA issue as the major concern for the industry.

GB It could even be a shortage of group fitness instructors, with new clubs opening up all the time. For example when one of the largest chains opens with 60 group fitness classes they need a lot of instructors. We (AIF) put through 25 qualified instructors every quarter which obviously spreads the group fitness staff even thinner. These new clubs are also looking for 15 or so Personal Trainers. With the speed and growth of the industry, fitness training organisations are really struggling to keep up.

GG I personally believe the quality of staff is the responsibility of the owners and managers of the club. I think the RTO's have a responsibility to produce the best candidate possible but as I see it I'm looking to hire on four principles - attitude, character, personality and emotional intelligence. They are the four things I can't change.

I can help refine their skills as a PT and a membership consultant, [but] it's the hiring cycle where the problem lies, a lot of people are hiring out of desperation and it's driven by the burn and churn [mentality] and the industry is driving that and owners and managers are in control of that. The frantic way seasonal marketing and promotional campaigns are operated see high peaks and low troughs throughout the year which sees membership staff burnt out on a regular basis compared with a consistent even approach to membership sales. The industry as a whole is responsible for those buying cycles.

SH As an example we [YMCA NZ] operated a more consistent approach to membership sales over the year. This resulted in a number of membership consultants developing their skills and

experience and not burning out. This eventually saw them working their way into other positions and two even now are club managers. This is in keeping with bringing staff through from good hiring processes, if the quality is poor at the bottom what is the quality at the top like?

GB What we do at the AIF is that we engage with what we call career partners or a selection of clubs. When talking to these career partners one of the expectations they have is that someone is going to come out of a course and be a great PT. That it is a misconception. The reality is as an RTO there is only so much we can do, someone can miss sessions or arrive late for lessons but if they sit that final exam and are competent at a base level we have to issue a certificate which is why the institute has now brought out a master level 1 Personal Training certificate. This focuses on the qualities they have demonstrated, [like] they can be punctual, never turned up late or leave early, always had their uniform and their practical session was of a higher level and they would have filled in an experience log book.

Hiring on attitude and personality is the approach the industry needs to have, they can come from any RTO but they will only ever be at a base level and it's the manager's responsibility to train them up.

GG It's very much the owner and manager's responsibility as the person has self selected themselves (I want to be a PT) not knowing they have the innate ability to do that. So as owners and managers we need to determine that they have the qualification but do they have the innate skills.

SH Edel, how does the Curves franchise employ their teams and what qualifications are required?

EK We advise our franchisees to employ on pride, passion and personality. To find the right person through that, and then empower them through quality training. We have our own quality training within the Curves University which we make a requirement for all our staff to attend. They must attain this level before they are placed in front of a member. We take them from all areas and then they will undertake Curves training in line with Curves University.

JW We are taking our staff down a more traditional approach but all our staff are required to be Cert 3. I think it's more than us [Fitness industry] it really is a national concern. If we look at Perth for example you can earn a \$100k driving a truck in the mines. You are not going to be an exercise professional for \$40k. You'd be nuts. I think we are struggling with that not only in Perth but around the country so I think that it's a labour shortage issue across Australia. We counsel our franchisees whilst it is tough to find the quality its worth going through the pain to find staff with all the correct attributes rather than employing two legs and a heartbeat. Then it's totally the clubs responsibility to motivate, to develop, to train them, and to keep hold of those quality staff.

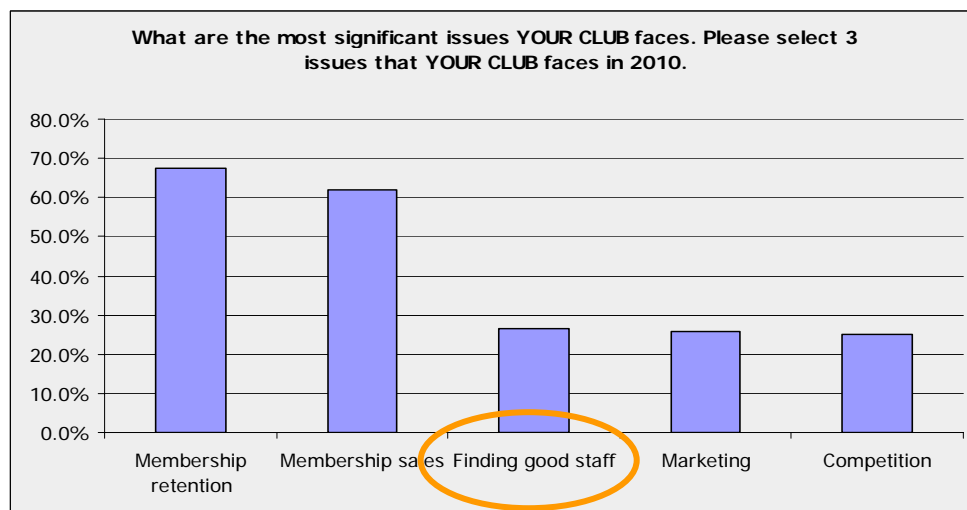
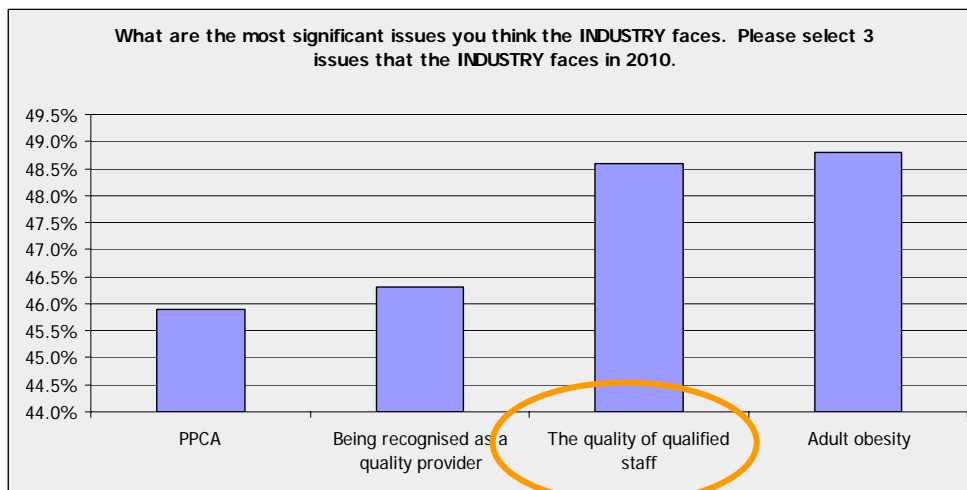
JH At Healthy Inspirations our focus is weight loss - the Cert 3 just doesn't cover it. Like my colleagues we have to have our own training which at the moment doesn't require them to have a Cert 3 or Cert 4. I think globally the challenge of finding good staff can be looked at in reverse with staff finding a good manager. I think many operators be it with in the franchise system or not, don't have good systems to train their staff and many operators believe that staff arrive with a Cert 3 or 4 and if there's no systems in place, that's when things fall apart. Especially when staff arrive with little experience.

JT Following on from JH answer - my observations are that the majority of owners don't have any human resources background and clubs need a HR background now more than ever. Because of what JW was saying the Gen Y's are coming into our industry and our owners aren't used to dealing with this generation. So what can we do to improve? We need the structure, education and management tools to manage people and manage HR. I was in a club in QLD and they still don't have job descriptions or give letters of appointment to staff that's just one example but I think it's across the whole for our industry.

GG I think one of the big problems is the PT side of things with the employed versus the contracted system. I've changed from contract trainers to employed trainers so I have control over them. I can mandate that they attend training and follow protocol. There's so little control and I think the number of contracted trainers does cause a whole lot of problems and a big pressure point in clubs around personal training.

MG At our clubs staff has to come in with a qualification but that doesn't necessary mean they start on the floor straight away. We have a 4 month training plan done in conjunction with a local RTO and then they are assessed so we can test they can actually do what their Certificate says they can do. We don't find an issue with the quality of staff as we are responsible for the quality we put on the floor. We just have a problem with keeping them.

GB That's why you find a lot of long term staff members in the career change and they come into the industry and say I'm not earning as much but man I'm enjoying my life. Where as a lot of Y generation coming in are saying that I want this and I want that and I want it now and I want a massive pay increase and you're battling that and their expectations are not the reality of what a business can provide. They then find it too hard and go onto something else.



The 2010 AFIS discussion series covers 6 critical fitness topics including, staff quality, social media, membership fees, retention and growth and the concerns around membership contracts. The full series can be viewed on www.fitnesssurvey.com.au. Visit our stand P22 at the Health and Fitness Expo.

Simon Hall – Marketing Manager - Ezypay Pty Ltd – January 2010