



I “word” it through the grapevine

Sometimes the things trainers and teachers say in fitness continue to survive for decades simply out of habit. To be sure, alignment, breathing cues and consistent safety practices all have a place in fitness, but just as our understanding of language has evolved, the fitness industry must evolve in the way that it speaks, too. This article explores not only three of the ways we communicate, but also some common types of traditional cues used in both the group and private fitness environments; one can often find alternate—and research-based—types of rephrasings to elicit a deeper sense of understanding from clients.

Three-Dimensional Cueing: Ears, Eyes, Heart

Cueing in three dimensions means having a keen sense that some clients and classes will interpret meaning from what they *hear* come out of our mouths in terms of not only words, but tone and volume as well. The success of predominantly visually taught disciplines, such as Zumba®, confirm that others will receive meaning from what they *see* us do with our body language. Still others will derive meaning based on how our overall communication makes them *feel*. These three dimensions of cueing help us address the greatest number of learners in the greatest number of ways because cueing exclusively in one realm, such as leading a class without speaking, cannot ever teach successfully to 100% of students. Three-dimensional cueing, therefore, applies to all of to-

day's teachers and trainers, regardless of discipline.

In many group fitness classes, the most proficient and gregarious often settle into the front row. The majority of students representing the average level of difficulty (commonly referred to as “level 2” on a 3 level system) tend to settle into the middle of the room. Conversely, the newer, less fit, and generally shy individuals who may not feel as comfortable in the class settle into the back row. Instructors and trainers wishing to show a keen sense of understanding of this dynamic may wish to consider teaching with ears for the front row, eyes for the middle row, and heart for the back row.

Mindset Behind the Communication

More than communicating from our habitual comfort level, a true understanding of the client mindset proves to be one of the most important aspects for choosing the aforementioned techniques of communication. Michael Mantell, motivational speaker, cognitive-behavior coach, author and speaker based in San Diego, is the author of *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff: P.S. It's All Small Stuff*, and cautions against using the fitness nomenclature so popular today. “Sometimes we make assumptions about all clients,” warns Mantell, and “thinking that everyone wants to be ‘shredded,’ ‘chiseled,’ ‘jacked,’ ‘blasted’ or ‘cut’ does not always work when the truth is that the majority of people just want to achieve optimal health.”



Maximizing the Power of Your Fitness Communication

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

Finding out what type of language motivates your client allows you to effect a deeper change. Mantell encourages trainers to understand the unique, separate personalities of clients to be able to relate to them. "Speak to the personality of your client, not to your own personality," he advises. "Change your language as needed among clients. Unless you've engaged the self-talk of that client, you have not engaged that client."

Positivism in Verbal Cueing

Most behavioral psychologists and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) specialists agree that usually the delivery's importance outweighs the actual words and suggest cueing in the positive realm. Studies have shown that the subconscious mind cannot comprehend a negative, therefore taking time to discuss negatives only prolongs the undesired behavior. For example, cueing, "Don't let the knees go past the toes in a squat" makes the brain spend time processing behavior we do not want and then reorder movement patterns to make the opposite of what we have put into words actually happen.³

Solution: Get into the habit of starting cues with the word "keep," so everything after that has to be a positive cue. For instance, "Keep the knees behind the toes," "Keep breathing," and "Keep the navel squeezing in" all help clients focus on getting results faster than having to reinterpret a negative cue.

Violet Zaki, owner of Zakifitness, holistic health coach, and neuro-linguistic practitioner, agrees, noting that "our language affects results, so state requests and directions in both a positive and specific manner." On being specific with clients, Zaki says, "When I use the word 'try,' my clients won't process the language and store it for a change in their behavior, such as telling them to 'try to be here by 6 a.m. tomorrow.' This lowers their chance of showing up. If instead I say, 'You must be here by 6 a.m. tomorrow,' or 'See you at 6 a.m. tomorrow,' more power exists in these words."

Should

Trainers often tell their clients that they "should be on their toes in the push-up sequence," "should be feeling this in their abs," and "should be swinging the kettlebell this way."

Two issues occur when we overuse "should." First, in telling clients that they should be doing a certain thing, we assume that all individuals work at the same rate and ability of physical fitness instead of realizing that we need to give them different progressions and regressions. Second, statements such as the above stop short of telling the clients why they are doing some particular movement.

Solution: When using "should," try to complete sentences with a statement of purpose—for instance, "You should keep the knees behind the toes because this helps you to emphasize your glutes and keeps your knees working smoothly."