

3 Big Mistakes Gyms Make with Their Boot Camp Programs

By Georgette Pann

If you already own a gym or have access to gym facilities, it makes good sense to offer a fitness boot camp. A fitness boot camp provides a more personalized approach to fitness than the typical gym membership and provides a very different sort of work than aerobics, yoga, Pilates and other types of group fitness.

But running a boot camp in a gym has a unique variety of challenges. Let's look at three common mistakes that gym owners make when launching a boot camp in their gym and how to avoid them . . .

Mistake #1: Not Charging Additional Fees or Not Making it Clear that Boot Camp Requires Additional Fees Separate from Gym Membership Dues

A properly run boot camp requires extra effort on your part than most other classes and gym programs. Your gym boot camp may also make use of additional equipment or pay fees for using parks or public spaces. Plus, boot camps should be an additional stream of revenue for you. For these reasons and probably some others, you should not include boot camps as part of your regular gym membership.

Besides, including it as part of the gym memberships gives members the impression that they can show up and participate whenever they want to. Obviously, lack of commitment to your boot camp renders the program ineffective. You've designed your boot camp to get maximum results over a particular time period with a particular number of sessions in that time period. If a gym member misses half the sessions, they aren't going to get the results you promised—boot campers have to be committed.

The other side of this coin is not making it clear to members that boot camp requires fees in addition to their gym membership dues and why it is extra. This is taken care of simply by saying something on all your advertisements as simple as, "Regular cost is \$150, Gym members pay only \$100." Just make sure the amount gym members pay isn't the same as their membership dues so they can't mistakenly think boot camp is part of the membership.

Some members may not understand why they have to pay extra for boot camp. To avoid this, make sure all your advertisements and flyers highlight the benefits of boot camp that don't come with a standard gym membership—the personalized nutrition plans, the personal trainer-quality programming, guaranteed results, etc.

Mistake #2: Not Separating Boot Camp Enough from Other Gym Activities

The more your boot camp feels or looks like just another class of gym activity, the more members will expect it included as part of their membership. If your boot campers are using gym space or gym machines during the same hours that regular members are

allowed to use them, then boot camp looks like a regular gym function. The same is true if boot campers are allowed to come and go whenever they want to during a session.

Here are some basic guidelines for drawing a clear line between your boot camp and regular gym functions:

- Whenever possible, hold boot camp in a location separate from the main floor of your gym and rooms that other classes take place in.
- If you must hold your boot camp in the same room as other classes, close the door and hang a sign on it that says something like, “Boot Camp in Session. Do Not Enter.”
- If you must hold boot camp on your main gym floor, cordon off the area being used by boot campers with yellow “Warning” tape found at home improvement stores or with colored rope.
- As an alternate to cordoning off part of the gym, hold boot camp at times when regular members don’t have access to the gym.
- Do not let boot campers come and go as they please. Schedule a water and bathroom break if you need to, during which all boot campers break together. Not only does this help separate boot camp from the rest of the gym, but it also fosters a sense of unity among your boot campers.
- Require that boot campers wear boot camp T-shirts during boot camp sessions. If necessary, collect them at the end of each session and wash them yourself to make sure they are ready for next session and no one forgets their T-shirts. Or have a couple extras on hand in case someone forgets their T-shirt. Account for cost of T-shirts and laundry in the cost of your boot camp.

Mistake #3: Not Enough Variety in Boot Camp Workouts to Keep Boot Campers Interested

The temptation with indoor boot camps is to rely too heavily on the standard bodyweight exercises that don’t take up much space, such as push-ups, sit-ups, pull-ups, jumping jacks, mountain climbers, etc. These exercises allow you to keep everyone in a fairly tight group so you can use a smaller space than you would outdoors. Another temptation is to rely too much on the machines and equipment on your gym floor. Both scenarios can lead to a lack of variety in your boot camp program. Lack of variety reduces effectiveness of your program and bores your boot campers to tears.

Here are some ways to add variety to your indoor boot camp:

Variety Strategy 1: Stock up on stability balls, medicine balls, balance boards, body bars, resistance bands and similar small pieces of equipment with great versatility. You can focus on bodyweight exercises one session, stability ball exercise the next session, and so on to add lots of variety. Some indoor boot camps also use equipment like Lebert Equalizers and TRX Suspension Trainers.

Variety Strategy 2: Use partner exercises to mix up the normal routine once in a while. One partner does the exercise while the other provides resistance.

Hundreds of combinations for this. Medicine ball passing drills also make good partner exercises

Variety Strategy 3: Use everything around you, including walls, tables, chairs and gym equipment (provided this doesn't lead to Mistake #2 above) to create unique exercises or add resistance to your typical exercise.

Variety Strategy 4: Use relay and team exercises to add some extra fun and variety. Line 'em up for leap frog around the room or medicine ball passes. Or split them into teams for wheelbarrow races and sprints. Not only are these great fun, but they are a great workout and employ muscles that the usual bodyweight exercises often don't use.

Variety Strategy 5: Employ circuit training to add more variety with less equipment. Divide them into groups and assign each group an exercise station. Allow 2-3 minutes at each station; then rotate the groups.

Using these techniques will make your boot camp stronger and help differentiate it from the usual gym activities, so you can successfully charge a fee that will be profitable for you.

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