

HOW TO AVOID MISSED PERSONAL TRAINING SESSIONS

By Nick Holtzman, NSCA-CPT.

I remember back in the day training at my first club, a regular occurrence that would happen from many of my personal training clients would be the "cancel 5 minutes before the session" phone call. I would have driven 20 minutes to the club and be standing there, looking at my watch wondering where my client was, only to have him call and say "I can't make it; I am not feeling good, let's just move this appointment to next week". I still remember standing there speechless, hesitant to say "Well I drove all the way up here for this appointment, and I could have filled this spot with another client". It became a very frustrating situation but because my club had no 24 hour cancellation policy, and I was too naive and new to enforce one myself, there was plenty of money and time I was being robbed of.

It wasn't until I began getting a couple of years under my belt that I began to realize the importance of enforcing the 24 hour cancellation policy. It basically works like this:

- The client must contact me by phone or email by 8pm the night before an appointment if he/she will not make it to the session. Otherwise, he or she will be charged.**
- Exceptions, of course, are made in the cases of extreme emergencies.**

I HIGHLY recommend that you enforce a similar policy for your existing and for all future clients you have if you have not already done so. Nothing is more frustrating than a client cancelling 5 minutes before the session. You miss out on potential \$, you waste your time, and it devalues your service and professionalism. Just imagine if lawyers and physical therapists allowed late cancellations; it wouldn't happen, right? Why not hold your own services in the same regard? After all, you are a professional, and are providing a service with results that are priceless to your clients.

I have all new clients sign a sheet explaining the 24 hour cancellation policy. I have never had a client complain about it; they are all professionals themselves and fully understand. It is also important to have the sheet because that way when a client has to late cancel, he/she will already be aware of the policy, and there will not be any awkward "Well, Steve, you know you will still be charged, right?" conversation.

I have noticed that by enforcing this policy, clients hold you in higher respect and will keep appointments that they otherwise would have cancelled. So in that respect, it is also a good way to keep client retention! I can't tell you the number of times I have heard a client say "I was going to cancel because I was feeling unmotivated but I did not want to lose the \$70, so I forced myself to come."

If you do not already have a 24 hour cancellation policy in affect, I highly recommend you enforce one. Simply print up a sheet with the policy on it, explain that you have had some incidents in the past (of course, never from the client you are speaking to!) and want to keep things more professional. Then have the client sign it and both of you will be on the same page. Believe me, they will respect and value your services a lot more!