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## The buddy system

**Busy executives rely on personal trainers to help stick to a fitness routine**

**Beth Gallagher**

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Carol Leaman had just arrived home from a weeklong business trip when she began lacing up her running shoes.

It was a hectic day and the Waterloo business executive had plenty of reasons to skip her usual workout. Jet lag was certainly one. There were also phone calls and e-mails to return, not to mention the fact that she was leaving on vacation that evening and had a long list of domestic tasks to take care of.

Despite the time crunch, Leaman went to her one-hour workout. Someone was expecting her.

Leaman hired a personal trainer last March and works out with him three times a week. She wouldn't miss her fitness session any more than she would skip a business meeting or a doctor's appointment.

"If I know somebody is standing there, expecting me to be there, I'll go," says Leaman, 41. "But if it's a club thing and I pay an annual fee, I'll go for a month and then I'll find every reason in the book not to go."

Leaman is among a growing number of corporate executives who schedule time in their busy week for fitness. While health and weight loss are driving forces behind the trend, so is the discovery that regular workouts actually enhance the participant's ability to manage the stress of corporate life.

Jogging on a treadmill and pumping weights has helped Leaman, who sometimes works 16-hour days at the office, feel more energetic at work and home.

"I have more stamina, which contributes to my ability to do my job," she says.

"I feel more awake than when I'm not exercising. I don't get that mid-afternoon fog."

For many business people, hiring a personal trainer with whom they meet one to three times a week has been the only way they've stayed committed to a fitness regime after years of false starts.

"If you say you're going to exercise when you have a free moment . . . you know what's going to happen," says Jason Droppert, Leaman's personal trainer.

Droppert, who co-owns Peak Fitness with his wife, Bethanne, says business clients like the accountability of having a personal trainer. Clients also enjoy the relationship and support they get from him, and his expertise means they get results more quickly than if they are working out on their own.

"If you're putting the time out, you want to do something that's going to be effective for you," says Droppert.

Leaman, an accountant who has run high-tech companies in the past and is currently working as a management consultant, says any jobs she takes on have to accommodate the fitness regime she has grown to love.

Personal trainers say their corporate clients like programs that take into account a lifestyle that includes frequent travel and long working hours.

Leaman admits she neglected her fitness regime when she was away on her recent business trip to British Columbia. "This is going to hurt," she says as she settles onto an inclined bench press.

Sticking to a fitness routine on the road is a challenge, says Marsha Vanwynsberghe, a personal trainer and part-owner of Personal Edge Training in Kitchener. She likes to send her business clients away with exercise bands and a short 20-minute travel program to do while they're out of town. Sometimes she e-mails her travelling clients to see how they're doing and lend some moral support.

Like Peak Fitness, many of the clients at Personal Edge Training are business people. While weight loss is an issue, Vanwynsberghe agrees with Droppert that most are looking for a way to manage their stress and improve their health.

"They're in their mid-40s, their dad just had a heart attack and they admit that they haven't done anything to take care of their health," she says.

The number of business people who are hiring personal trainers, at a cost of \$30 to \$80 per hour, encourages John Whitney, 55, a commercial realtor who has always made fitness a priority in his life.

The president of J.J. Barnicke Whitney Ltd. in Waterloo says he has seen dramatic changes in people, and when he asks what happened, they reply: "I've found fitness."

Whitney, who has competed in triathlons, says as executives age, they want to keep up with younger colleagues.

"When they're in a world of younger, fitter people, they don't want to feel they're out of shape and can't keep up. . . . A fitness regime helps keep a mind and body healthy," Whitney says.

Most new recruits are amazed at their ability to get things done more efficiently.

"Exercise tends to allow you to have a larger bandwidth to take on more stuff," says Whitney, who swims and cycles most mornings between 5:30 and 7 a.m.

While he doesn't have a personal trainer himself, Whitney thinks it's a great idea for people who are new to regular fitness. A trainer, he says, can help keep them motivated and gives them the benefit of years of education and experience.

Droppert says it's important to hire a trainer with credentials. These include certification through an organization called Can Fit Pro, a university degree in a related field and, most importantly, good experience.

Referrals are a great way to hire a personal trainer, he says. A business colleague at a women's networking event referred Leaman to Droppert.

John Does, 42, owner of Ortho-Care Precision Orthotics Inc. in Kitchener, had tried for years to keep faithful to an exercise regime, but other commitments would eventually take over or he would injure himself.

Even the "buddy system" failed when either he or his friend would cancel planned workouts together.

These days, Does is working out twice a week with personal trainer Craig Haney, another co-owner at Personal Edge.

He's also enjoying running now, an activity he hated for years. "There was a time when I would rather vacuum the house than run," Does says.

Like most entrepreneurs, there are times when he has to work very long hours and if Haney wasn't waiting for him, Does says he wouldn't exercise.

It's a challenge Carol Leaman understands well. As she picks up two hand weights, Droppert says, "If Carol didn't have this booked in . . ."

". . . I wouldn't be doing it," his client says, completing the sentence while settling into a set of pectoral flies.



Personal trainer Jason Droppert spots Carol Leaman as the business executive does shoulder presses at Droppert's home-based training gym in Waterloo.



Fitness enthusiast John Whitney, president of commercial real-estate firm J.J. Barnicke Whitney Ltd. in Waterloo, hits the road for a morning bicycle ride.