



11 THINGS ALL GREAT GROUP INSTRUCTORS KNOW

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No matter how knowledgeable you are with FRC/KINSTRETCH techniques, skills or with one-on-one instruction, managing a group requires a unique set of skills. Starting back in '92 in leotards, I entered the fitness industry as a group instructor. All instructors lived and died by the class attendance. If you were good, people came to your class. Through those years, I both failed *and* succeeded but I learned a ton from the experience of teaching and even more from watching better instructors hone their craft. You can create a WOW moment for your class with these 11 tips all great instructors know that will bring them back for more.

1. Entrances and exits are important. You are the leader and therefore “host” of the event/class. View it as your “party” and the clients are your guests. You want them to enjoy their time, feel it was worth the fee and want to come back again with their friends. As the host, be there to greet your attendees before they arrive, help them feel welcome and thank them for coming. Throughout class, check in to make sure everyone can hear you, can see you and is comfortable with temperature and volume. Kind words and smiles at the end with a mention of what was learned and what’s to come is a great way to end the class. The feelings and memories evoked at the beginning and end of class are easily remembered.

2. Provide a sample work station. Many feel a bit of angst when they first attend a group session. They fret about “messing up” by not being prepared or not doing things as

you like. Set up your workout space as a sample station so attendees can get set up as they arrive. I set up my mat, a pad/block and any balls we will be using for the class. This allows attendees to know what they need, feel ready for class and therefore more comfortable when we begin. Also, help everyone set up in rows/columns that fit well in the area. Learning the best configuration for the space may take some time but stick to it and be quick to help first arrivals set up in an effective way so others can fit as they arrive.

3. Each class should have a takeaway. Educating your clients is a big part of creating continued participation. Prepare one theme/talking point or educational sound bite that is meaningful. Announce the point as you begin the class, repeat the point during the class and remind students what they learned at the end of class to help reinforce the concept. Members will further understand the value of the class and have a sharable soundbite for what they just experienced. Some theme examples are: independent joint movement before interdependent, find your end range, stable segment allowing mobility in another segment, closing angle/opening angle, playing with various intensities/neural drive, pace/speed of movement, identifying the hinge points, etc.

4. Make it easy for class to follow your lead. Be well-versed in demonstrating movements facing the class and facing away. Assume people don't know left from right. Many times, participants are overstimulated as they learn new movements that they find it difficult to manage verbal and auditory cues at the same time. Visual demonstrations along with auditory cues are important. In a large group setting when learning new or difficult exercises, I find many movements are best demonstrated "facing away" so the class can follow more easily. If you are lucky enough to teach in a room with mirrored walls then facing away still allows you to see the students. Using positive language is easier to follow. Instead of using negative language like "slow down", I say "track with my pace" for a better result.

5. Provide personal coaching moments. Walk the room and give personal coaching. Asking questions such as "where do you feel the intensity?" and telling them where to increase the contraction/intensity and other ways of coaching are remarkable ways to connect to clients get better results. I've been told in private many times how much someone benefits during these private coaching moments. In most cases, get "permission" to touch or correct a position. Touch is an extremely valuable way to help someone feel the precise area you are working. You can ask and move in slowly letting the person know what you are about to do. When asking for permission I usually say, "May I show you something" or "May I place your arm here" or "May I help you lower your right hip?"

6. Cue for success. How we describe and cue a movement determines how well it is interpreted, performed and remembered. When using verbal cueing, give more external versus internal cues. Research shows that external cues improve transfer and retention of

information. An example of an internal cue is "lift your tailbone up" while an external cue might be "lift your tailbone to the ceiling". I find clients can relate well to "lift the top of your head to the ceiling" versus "straighten your back". "Brush the back wall with your thumbs" is an effective cue for swimmer's arms. Describing the pelvis as a bucket of water makes it very easy to explain where to pour the water out. This cue works very well for pelvic tilts and hip hiking. "Crush the beer can" or "squeeze the toothpaste tube" are my go-to cues for knee and elbow hinging. Shoulders depression is described as "squeeze the \$100 bill in your armpit". Work on your cues with others and see how they respond. I am sure you'll develop a wide range of external cues that work well. Cueing well before a movement allows for better engagement and less frustration as well.

7. Show the relevance. Make the connection between the exercise to life or sport. When not using your external cues, you can describe the joint action or anatomy as it relates to your clients' goals in everyday life or sports specific movements. Since I work mostly with golfers, I show golf photos and demonstrate deep squats as required in reading putts, hip flexion for getting out of a bunker as well as various other joint angles throughout the swing. We, as instructors, are naturally geared to see the connection but our clients benefit from direct examples.

8. Create a cult. Incentives, gifts, e-blasts, photos and contests really rev up the group commitment! One of the most memorable contests I did was the Toe Olympics. I introduced the challenge by making it sound like the person with the most toe control would receive the prize. I flipped the winner to the person whose toes needed the most help. The winners received a set of toe separators (costs just a few bucks at a drug store) used in nail salons as their prize. Those clients are still coming to class and definitely now have more control over their toes. This past July 3 & 5th, the class theme was "roisserie thigh" exercises, a take-off on grilling for July 4th (a USA holiday!). Then we proceeded to do hip flexion, extension, abduction and adduction. They love the illustration. Afterwards, I heard someone from class sharing the joke with another member. Members love themes based around the holidays or current events.

9. Provide hope and inspiration. As instructors, we need to be great at the moves we teach. There also needs to be a balance of demonstrating all your advanced stuff and staying at a more beginner level or right along with the class. Most of the time, I try to work at a level of difficulty "just above" the more advanced students. I lead the class at that level while frequently assisting and showing easier/beginner levels. No one wants to be called a beginner. No one sees themselves as a beginner so I do not use that word "beginner" at all. I do show regressions by calling them "modifications" or say "in case your hips are tight then try it this way". Progressions can also be shown for inspiration as well to show the class what the practice of KINSTRETCH can allow you to do. The class brightens up when I show difficult moves then break them down into regressions the class has

already experienced. This demonstrates hope and shows the likelihood that continued work can lead to greater abilities which is why they are coming to you in the first place.

10. **Each class is a novel.** Like all good novels, class should have a beginning, a build-up to a crescendo, a peak moment, a wind down and a great finish. And like all good stories, each class should have a theme and takeaway as mentioned in point #3. The beginning needs to be inclusive, warm and fuzzy. The build-up should feel purposeful and planned. The crescendo is challenging and inspirational. The wind down is again inclusive and doable by all students with little stress. The finish needs to be a memorable, even fun perhaps or provide a feel-good moment. You want to make the "characters" of the novel shine!

11. **Music creates the mood.** Music is pivotal in creating this novel story and maintain a smooth flow to the class. Participants will remember how they "feel" and music evokes strong feelings. Create your own playlists that fit the class. Seek out names of favorite artists from class members. Use music to create the crescendo and finale. Moving from a 80 to 90 bpm or from 90 to 100 bpm will add to the crescendo while moving back down to 90 bpm or slower for the breathing portion and finale will allow for a stress free and wonderful WOW moment.

When you provide the WOW moments, the class feels unified and commits to continued attendance while gaining the amazing benefits of the work. You will have a client for life. Practice these tips and ideas, practice teaching groups and practice teaching more. Film yourself and ask clients for feedback. Many will give honest feedback if you ask. Then, practice some more. Group classes have a special energy and excitement that cannot be replicated in other training situations. Show energy and feed off of the group energy as you provide an amazing client-centered, results-oriented workout. We have a great product with KINSTRETCH and now it's up to us to deliver it! Contact me if you would like to know more about teaching groups.

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