

# DRAWING THE LINE

**A holistic approach to training can blur the boundaries of the trainer:client relationship – but you must maintain those boundaries.**

**T**he factors that affect training don't just begin and end in the gym. Our clients, whether top class athletes or just training to stay in good shape, experience life in all its complexity alongside their training and performance programmes: relationship break-ups, bereavements, illness, stress and so on. As a trainer, you may want to help remove obstacles to the success of a training programme. But where do you draw the line in becoming a therapist as well as a trainer to your client?

As a trainer, you can show your clients the moves to make but you can't MAKE them do them, or with any regularity. So, rather than take on the burden of responsibility of someone's emotional well-being, it is more productive to act as a guide.

Knowing the right referrals to make is a great tool to have at your disposal; otherwise you risk an attitude of dependency by the client and in areas which you're not necessarily qualified to provide support. Remember your remit,

what you are being paid to do and what your objective is.

When it comes to adding strings to your bow, arguably these should be extensions of your existing field of work. The PT who takes on group work and develops a boot-camp module, or knows how to cover group ex classes, is one thing; it's quite another to develop any real understanding of counselling issues without committing to considerable study. So, don't confuse extra income with a job description that actually belongs to a whole other career. Be clear about what you're offering clients and why they came to you in the first place, and really **specialise** in that.

When putting the client first – as you should be – the question to ask is, "who's the best person for the job?" When that relates to training goals, hopefully that's you. If it's not, look to your network of professional contacts and be involved as necessary in the consultation process **(there's more about this in Paul Wright's article in this issue – see p37).**

While it can help to take relevant courses and qualifications in the areas of counselling, NLP, CBT and other therapeutic interventions, be aware that with even a little knowledge comes responsibility. Be open to liaising with other professionals your clients may be working with (e.g., psychiatrists and GPs) and be prepared to share your own interventions with them as appropriate. If a problem is beyond your level of experience, knowledge and qualification – especially when regarding mental health issues – be prepared to encourage referral rather than compensating with potentially dangerous intervention.

Jimmy Petruzzi is an internationally renowned performance and conditioning coach specialising in the areas of physical and mental preparation. As well teaching across several sports disciplines he has studied NLP and Hypnotherapy since 1993, using the techniques as an athlete and coach to great success. **fm**

## In practice: training the post-gastric band client

**Georgina Jupp, managing director, CK Academy**

Prescribing the exercise was, in many ways, the most straightforward element of programme design for this client: remaining emotionally detached proved a steep learning curve for our exercise referral specialist.

For a client who has decided to undergo a serious operation such as in this instance, there were many personal issues to resolve and, as the operation was recent, occasions when reassurance and external professional advice was sought.

Initially, the client had stated that "starving" was preferable to training in the gym – so it was clear that empathy, creative thinking and a real desire to help would be as crucial to success as

general support. We also discussed long-held beliefs and looked at alternative viewpoints, sharing tools and techniques for behavioural change.

The following skills and behaviours can help build effective relationships and appropriate boundaries:

- Set boundaries at the start to safeguard both client and trainer
- Actively listen to the client and help them question limiting beliefs
- Recognise when outside help is required and refer on
- Be clear about the programme's objectives and set out a clear pathway of how the client can achieve this, both in relation to exercise and lifestyle change
- Dedicate time to study research on

relevant topics that are highlighted and make that information accessible in ways that bring it to life for the client

- Be part of a strong and experienced team (this certainly helped our trainer on this occasion)

We help clients by using the extensive repertoire of skills we have at our disposal, primarily around safe and effective exercise and incorporating lifestyle change. But we are not trained to counsel and it is paramount we recognise our professional boundaries, have the resources to refer appropriately and step back when we are not what our clients need most. Appreciating just what a difference we make in the lives of our clients is pretty amazing, after all! **fm**