Fearless Leadership
By Connie Warasila

Scene: As you set up the pool for class, you notice a lot of new clients coming in for class today. You are prepared to teach a great class with all the bells and whistles but begin to doubt if the new people will “get it.” You mull over the options in your head as clients begin to remind you about their special needs and worry sets in. Your thoughts are filled with apprehension about the traveling, turning, suspending, intricate rhythms, stylized moves, and dramatic finishes. The fear of failure eats away at the confidence you had when you arrived and you begin class a watered-down, skeptical, average version of your potentially awesome self. As class progresses you miss a couple of cues because you’ve become less sure of yourself and then the group track comes. Feeling defeated you just teach it without enthusiasm, abandoning the plan to have the class work cooperatively and just teach it as any other track. You crawl through the rest of class and thank the gods (all of them) as you’re finishing the flexibility track without any showmanship, drama or star quality. You leave the class unfulfilled as a leader, your plan dissolved in the water of self-doubt, and your clients lukewarm about the presentation of the class and not sure they will return for another class. Does this ever happen to you? Can you relate?

WATERinMOTION is on a mission to help you overcome the pitfalls of teaching from a mindset of fear. The program is designed to provide the moves, music, and foundational education of water fitness but that might not be quite enough for some instructors who are new to water fitness, choreography, and dealing with special needs populations. Let’s face it, teaching water fitness involves some nuances that are absent from leading land fitness. Once you educate yourself about the water environment and teaching in it, build your confidence by teaching as much as you can, practicing the skills and techniques that have been presented in your WATERinMOTION certification. With practice, teaching does become more natural but fear of failure can still sometimes sneak in and derail your best plans. Some WATERinMOTION instructors have told us that teaching the group track, “just isn’t for my clients.” After investigating WHY the group track “just isn’t for my clients,” we find that some instructors struggle to present the group track with enthusiasm and confidence. So, instead, they just teach it like any other track missing the human interaction potential of the group track – something that is SO very important in water fitness classes. In an effort to boost our instructor’s confidence in leading every single track of WATERinMOTION, education about the fear of rejection and/or failure can help. Also, understanding the importance of social interaction during class will encourage you to insist on leading the track as designed and coach client participation in the group track, on some level. Lastly, revisiting the need for genuine enthusiasm for the program will help instructors be comfortable stylizing the movement and presenting it dynamically.

FEAR OF REJECTION/FAILURE

In Jia Jiang’s Ted Talk titled “What I Learned from 100 Days of Rejection,” he explored where his fear came from, how it manifested in his life,
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how he overcame it, and how overcoming it has impacted his life. There are multiple lessons to glean and practice from this presentation:

1. Face your fear (Rejection Therapy by Jason Comely). Look for opportunities to face your fear or be rejected and put yourself in that situation.
2. Stay engaged and give, or find out, more information (Ask why). Don’t run away or back down after initial rejection/failure.
3. Ask for what you want; you might get it.
4. Maximize your chance at getting a “Yes,” by identifying with the other person’s apprehension or doubt. Be empathetic.
5. Keep asking; be persistent.
6. Embrace rejection and let your reaction to rejection/failure define your success.

Practicing these lessons can have a deep and lasting impact on your success as a fitness leader. Think about it: our goal is to help people improve or maintain their skill, fitness and health levels. To do that, we sometimes need to motivate them to do things that they initially think they can’t do. Instead of joining in with their fear and doubt, introduce them to an avenue of success by being a great example of how to behave fearlessly. Try, stay engaged, ask for more information, empathize, and be persistent. Your behavior will rub off on those around you. That is a wonderful by-product of social interaction. If you are still wary of teaching confidently, I invite you to watch Amy Cuddy’s Ted Talk “Your body language shapes who you are.”

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Countless studies have been done to study the absolute necessity of social interaction between humans for existence. In an article published by Sunrise Senior Living, The Alzheimer’s Association is noted as stating, “research has shown that people who are regularly engaged in social interactions and activities are also better able to maintain healthy cognitive functions.” Social interaction helps to maintain health. The same article lists 5 benefits to the elderly with Dementia, gained through social interaction:

1. Loneliness has been linked to cognitive decline. Social interaction combats that.
2. Mental stimulation can have physical benefits, for example, lower blood pressure, and reduce their risk of cardiovascular problems and various forms of arthritis.
3. Being social helps seniors avoid mental health conditions. It lessens the risk of depression and improves sleep quality.
4. Social support helps seniors maintain their independence. Being surrounded by friends and individuals they can trust increases self-confidence and sense of purpose.
5. It can be beneficial to communicate through activities. This will encourage self-expression and can be very soothing for them if they are upset.

While not all of our older participants experience Dementia, it is clear that social interaction offers a wide variety of benefits to people.
According to Corey M. Clark of Rochester Institute of Technology, “A general theory that has been drawn from many researchers over the past few decades postulate that social support essentially predicts the outcome of physical and mental health for everyone.” In Clark's paper, “Relations Between Social Support and Physical Health,” six criteria are listed to measure a person's level of social health. Two of them are especially important for fitness leaders:

# 3 the level of social integration that the individuals are involved with, usually with a group of people, family or friends; and
# 5 the guidance and assurances of support given to the individual from a higher figure of person such as a teacher or parent.

This paper also states that positive social interaction contributes to increased longevity; that means longer life!

Another article published by the National Institute of Health examined the close correlation between social interaction and health. Many research studies were gathered and summarized in this article and concludes:

• Social interaction is consistently associated with biomarkers of health
• Positive social interaction can improve age-related disease associated with inflammation such as Alzheimer's disease, osteoporosis, rheumatoid arthritis, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer.
• Social isolation constitutes a major risk factor for morbidity and mortality.
• Loneliness may have a detrimental effect on physical, mental and emotional health.

The bottom line is that we, as fitness leaders, need to encourage social interaction, especially with our aging clients. This includes doing everything we can to improve exercise adherence, interaction with other class members, and guaranteeing that all activities we lead are inclusive. The group track offers the perfect opportunity for interactive play in an inclusive environment. Even if clients are slow to engage in the group track, take the time to explain why it is so important. This conversation may not happen during class, but instead before or after class. When I explain to my students the importance of social interaction, the purpose of the group track, and empathize with their apprehension, they change their perspective of the group track and are at least willing to try. As leaders, we set the tone of the group track. If we exhibit enjoyment, chances are the students will at least speculate that it could be fun and beneficial. If you are still skeptical, I invite you to watch Matthew Lieberman's Tedx Talk titled, “The Social Brain and its superpowers.”

ENTHUSIASM AND STYLIZING YOUR PRESENTATION

Are you still nervous about presenting your WATERinMOTION class with confidence? Allowing yourself to cast off your insecurities and teach class free of the fear of criticism can be difficult yet completely invigorating. The Rumba Kick with a little Latin flair can bring a smile not only to you, but also your students. Your uninhibited movement shows your students that they are in an environment that allows freedom of expression without judgement. Demonstrating the flexibility track with dramatic sweeps and appropriately placed singing to emphasize
positive lyrics exhibits playfulness and helps to bond with your clients. Showmanship is part of leading group fitness and, when mastered, can polish your presentation to a full shine.

And that’s what we wish for you as a WATERinMOTION instructor – for your greatness to shine through the structure of the class design. Harness your genuine love of helping others to healthy living to lead fearlessly, so that when you arrive to teach your next class, no amount of unfamiliar students, special needs, or negative input distracts you from presenting your best class. SPLASH ON!

Bibliography
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