

A Second Look at Certification

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Personal training has become, to a large extent, a romanticized profession. In fact, it isn't uncommon for those working in other well-paid professions to make a radical career change and become full-time personal trainers. The romanticism has its roots in a strong desire to work independently at a highly-gratifying activity, providing a needed service for cash in hand, and to integrate in an atmosphere where socializing is inevitable. The social aspect cannot be underestimated, as it fulfills the psychological need of human interaction and communication. This condition does not exist with many careers, particularly to the extent obtainable through personal training. Indeed, personal training can be one of the best career choices a person can pursue, not only because of its independent nature, but also the distinct selfish satisfaction realized by helping the young, old, injured, physically disabled, and athletic.

Quintessential, personal trainers play an important role in affecting the lives and health perceptions of the public. Very few professions can touch the lives of so many people, and in such a positive manner. Even if you are not a personal trainer, the process of certification is efficacious to your progress since it is an educational procedure designed to enhance one's current level of knowledge. There is no difference between training someone else and training yourself; either way, you must learn and integrate the fundamentals and derivatives of exercise science in order to optimize individual genetic ability or fitness related goals. If you felt otherwise, you would not be reading this article, or any of the thousands sprawled across the pages of physical culture magazines and the Internet.

Subsequently, it did not take long for a few fitness-oriented entrepreneurs to realize that money can be made by providing credentials, with the mere issuance of an exam and certificate. Two of the first, and better known organizations to emerge were the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) and the American Council on Exercise (ACE). Many others quickly followed suit, all with a different method, protocol, and flavor of the month hoping to cash in on a specific niche in the market.

Interestingly, certifying organizations, although educational facilities, are not officially recognized as such. To explain, it is necessary to understand the process and meaning of certification. Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary defines certified as *"having or proved by a certificate; guaranteed; reliably endorsed."* A certificate, in our sense of the word, is defined as *"a document attesting to the fact that a person has completed an educational course, issued either by an institution not authorized to grant diplomas, or to a student not qualifying for a diploma."* In essence, this means that anyone can issue a "certificate" in accordance to their standards since it is not classified as a "diploma". Calling your 8 x 10 sheet of paper a diploma places you in a whole different ball game, but the term certificate is not regulated by any current laws.

I have received several inquiries asking who regulates our certification course, that being offered by the International Association of Resistance Trainers (I.A.R.T.). I explained, as previously asserted, that since every certification institute is neither a college nor university, no governing body exists nor needs to exist. Moreover, who would regulate the process; the government? Even world-leading exercise scientists cannot agree on an intelligent exercise protocol or direction. And this is where problems emerge. I believe that it generally is accepted among intelligent people that not all information taught in post-secondary schools is factual, accurate or up-to-date -- at least that's my impression from speaking to several objective college graduates, particularly those specializing in the sciences, arts, and philosophy.

Now, consider how arbitrary and erroneous the materials must be among unregulated certification programs, whose standards and policing of information is often deemed questionable and politically self-serving. It may then be argued that the I.A.R.T., likewise, falls into the same mixing pot as ACE, ISSA, NSCA, Super Slow, and CPTN, among other certifiers. However, currently the I.A.R.T. is the only certifying body promoting fitness to be prescribed in an exact dose/response relationship in accordance to each individual's trainability (genetics) and psychology. In other words, we do not concretize exactly what to do, unlike every other

school of thought, rather we provide the critical thinking and problem solving tools to determine those requirements.

To elucidate, we have some students training each body part/exercise once every 3-7 days, whereas some only train each body part/exercise once every 14 days! This is not an exaggeration, but which frequency was determined through the I.A.R.T.'s methods of analysis for fine-tuning individual needs. The same holds true for varying the time under tension and workout volume, again being reflective of an individual's tolerance to strain, i.e., the amount of stimulus and recovery time necessary to produce optimal gains. Similarly, medical doctors do not prescribe the same dosage of drug to everyone, but will do so individually and scrupulously.

The I.A.R.T. also has a Nutritionalysis method, providing similar critical tools as our resistance training protocol, to determine optimum individual nutrition requirements. Finally students specifically, and without question will establish whether supplements are necessary, the correct amount of nutrients in their proper ratios, and ideal eating regimens in accordance to clientele's likes and dislikes. Most "nutritionists" merely photocopy "canned" eating programs and the USRDA Food Pyramid. Although both can be helpful in establishing a starting point, doing so does not address specific needs. Am I saying that the I.A.R.T. is superior to other certifications? If the above argument does not make it obvious, then I emphatically say, "YES!" And to paraphrase Arthur Jones' remark about MedX equipment, "*We may not be perfect, but we're the best damn thing out there!*" Hence, our motto is, "If you're not certified through the I.A.R.T., then you're not qualified." We do not merely spew our ideas, but rationally interconnect and explain every suggestion. We could only do so if our materials were based on noncontradictory principles and if one book complimented and flowed from and into the next. Conversely, peruse the materials of other leading organizations; either you will note a deficiency of integration, that the order of information has no specific rhyme nor reason, or the materials lack in sufficient detail, i.e., a focus on one particular aspect while neglecting equally important program criteria.

Every day we receive phone calls and e-mails from currently certified personal trainers who are investigating the I.A.R.T. because they feel inadequate with their abilities -- although they are, indeed, certified! These individuals are not just certified, but certifiably confused and were, in my opinion, financially conned by a fraudulent company under the guise of an "exercise authority." Nearly all certification companies steer clear of precision, while promoting insanely convoluted ideas, embracing the concept of "everything has value." Consequently they prescribe 3-5 sets of 3-5 exercises, training 3-6 times per week, while periodizing high volume, low volume, high intensity, low intensity, slow speed, fast speed... ad nauseam. It is little wonder that personal trainers are confused -- even their teachers are uncertain.

It is in these company's favor that exercise science remains elusive, nebulous, and mysterious to avoid the vengeful wrath of retaliatory consumers. For, just as you are unsatisfied with an appliance, automobile or piece of gym equipment that does not meet with your approval, neither should you be content with an organization's teaching procedures and philosophy. Even some I.A.R.T. students have returned their certification packages since they did not believe in our procedures. This occurred in only three instances with physiotherapists, all of whom typically and erroneously continue to rehabilitate patients with multiple exercise sessions several times per week, and sometimes for several hours at a time, neglecting the possibility of overuse atrophy and further injury. Their procedures are likewise questionable, incorporating potentially dangerous practices such as high-force plyometrics and "instability" exercises, hypothetically to increase stability of the joints and soft tissues! Although we are confident and proud of our certification processes, we have our greatest challenge ahead; convincing the health clubs of the only rational approach -- that being the I.A.R.T.'s SynerLogistics(TM) method of fitness practice.

We occasionally lose potential students because most gyms hire those who graduate from a 'more recognized' institution, i.e., ACE, NSCA, ISSA -- the same organizations that promote high volume, plyometrics, ballistics, and Olympic lifting. In this instance people are confusing visibility with credibility. Others hire those who graduate from a community college leisure program that teaches nothing about regulating intensity, volume, and frequency in accordance to principles of stress physiology (some don't even touch upon strength training!).

However, this will also be the downfall of those health clubs, since the promotion of arbitrary, multiple-hour, frequent, high-force training can only endure so long before patrons leave because of lack of results, motivation, and injury.

Nevertheless, such irrational hiring practices occur regardless of how ignorant the graduated student may be, or how sterile the organization's ideas and ideals are -- which situation is absolutely pathetic considering the fees some personal trainers charge clients. Also, some trainers simply do not care, so long as they are "recognized" within the fitness industry in order to secure employment. One of our students in Toronto, Ontario visited his brother in New York. While there, he trained at a local gym and began a friendly debate with a "certified" trainer. Within minutes of discussing exercise fundamentals, the New York trainer stated, and I paraphrase, *"Actually, I don't really understand what you're saying, and I don't really care to. I have my select clientele, they think I'm the greatest, and I'm happy with that."* Hence, not all certified trainers are created equal!

The I.A.R.T. is, in fact, recognized; not only with the federal government as an educational institute (which is a rare privilege), we're currently the most talked-about certification organization in the fitness industry, from the Internet to gym discussions and debates around the world because we are so unconventional and superior in our practices. It is part of our philosophy to seek the most logical approach to fitness prescription, a set of tools to discover how each person can achieve the fastest results in the safest manner possible, and in the shortest period. Consequently, because of the effectiveness of our procedures, in a matter of an initial eight months (in 1995) we have grown from a Canadian to an international organization, with students in England, Wales, Scotland, India, Asia, Australia, and the USA. And our official journal, Synergy, is read in over 20 countries.

Isn't it time you turned your back on ignorance? Join our legion of new intellectuals by becoming accredited by the I.A.R.T. as a Fitness Clinician. I urge you to e-mail me with any questions at: info@ExerciseCertification.com