

aaronwhear

career fitness

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Aaron Whear

Aaron Whear was born in Melbourne, Victoria, and grew up living and breathing sport. Excelling at cricket, he played at representative level as a junior before going on to enjoy a successful career as a senior cricketer, playing both Premier and Sub District grade cricket with distinction.

After completing a Bachelor of Applied Science (Physical Education) degree, Aaron began his career in the fitness industry in 1992, moving quickly up the ranks from personal trainer to gym manager. It was while in this role as a gym manager that Aaron realised how great the gap was between what new personal trainers were being taught and what gyms required of them. Fuelled by a strong desire to help bridge this gap between education and real world needs, he moved into the fitness leader education field.

Aaron now runs Career Fitness, a consulting company based in Melbourne. Career Fitness partners with the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) to deliver the Certificate III and IV in Fitness courses for budding gym instructors, group exercise instructors and personal trainers. In addition, Career Fitness conducts a wide range of CEC/PDP point courses specifically designed for qualified fitness instructors looking to meet industry re-registration requirements.

As well as teaching the next generation of fitness instructors, Career Fitness offers a mentoring and coaching service that assists health and wellbeing business owners to improve operational efficiencies and profitability. Aaron also works with corporate organisations to bring health and fitness into the workplace through health assessments, exercise sessions and seminars based on his 'game plan' philosophy.

Aaron lives in Point Cook, Melbourne, with his highly supportive wife Simone and his energetic son Kayden. When he isn't working you can find him playing cricket, pumping weights at the gym, reading, or spending quality time with his family.

What does health mean to you and how do you achieve it (have more of it)?

A person's health is their state of physical and mental wellbeing. Physically it means being able to do what you want, when you want, while mentally it means having the energy and ability to think clearly, respond positively to challenging situations and be able to switch off when appropriate.

We often don't respect our health until we lose it. The little known fact is that we can achieve better health simply by eating a balanced diet, doing a surprisingly small amount of physical activity, developing regular sleep routines, and ensuring we unwind and recharge when necessary.

What was the turning point for you when you decided that you wanted to work with people (as a health and wellbeing expert)?

I was very overweight as a child and can still remember being teased in the school yard; it was horrible. But during my early teenage years I was able to lose a lot of that weight which improved my ability to play cricket - my chosen sport. Then, when I started university I discovered weight training. Fitness and good health became a real passion.

My journey from unfit and overweight to fit and muscular made me want to help others achieve the same. To me there is no greater joy than helping people change their lives for the better. Initially, after finishing my physical education degree, I did this while working as a gym instructor and personal trainer.

I deliver my messages on health, fitness and wellbeing to even greater audiences, teaching the next generation of fitness instructors as a Certificate III & IV in Fitness lecturer, and delivering my 'Game Plan' message as a corporate speaker.

What is the biggest mistake people make in relation to their health and wellbeing?

Not getting started! I'd be a very wealthy man if I had a dollar for every person I've met socially during my career who, upon finding out I was a personal trainer, has said, "I'm looking to join a gym once I lose a few kilos".

I am sure people think you need to be a certain size or have a certain level of fitness in order to start exercising, but this to me is the wrong way of thinking. If someone is currently doing no physical activity then they start walking for 20 minutes each night, that's a great start towards a healthier life. If they are currently eating fast-food four nights a week then cut that down to three, they are on their way.

In a gym context I have seen many people start out with limited time to work out, some with as little as 20 minutes at lunchtime. But that's a start - many of these people soon see and feel themselves getting fitter, stronger and healthier with just that small daily effort. These early results become the catalyst that drives greater results. They shift their priorities and all of a sudden are able to free up 60 minutes a day in order to do more. The key is to just start; the health and wellbeing changes will flow in time. As they say, a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step, and so it is with health, fitness and wellbeing.

What are the five key areas we need to focus on in order to maintain health and fitness?

1. GAME PLAN

As a personal trainer and business coach, the main message I teach my clients is to formulate a winning 'Game Plan'. This means having both a specific goal, and a process for achieving that goal.



In practical terms this involves an initial health and fitness evaluation. There, baseline measures are established against which progress can be measured. These measures should be taken regularly to give ongoing feedback on progress towards the desired goal.

2. EXERCISE

It's important to have a defined exercise program that combines both planned and incidental exercise. Planned exercise includes regular weight training, running, walking, cycling, and sport. Incidental exercise is any unplanned exercise such as taking the stairs instead of the lift or walking to the shops instead of driving.

Several studies using pedometers to record how many steps someone takes in a day, have indicated that many who start a planned exercise program actually move less than they did before. Because they had been to the gym, it seemed they now felt it was ok to drive to the shops instead of walking - they had done their exercise for the day. In many cases this meant that people were actually less active after starting an exercise program than previously, as shown by the number of steps they were taking each day. My advice is to not underestimate the importance of incidental exercise, particularly for those who have weight-loss goals in mind. Incidental exercise can significantly add to the number of calories burned each day.

3. NUTRITION

Most dieticians agree that active people should eat approximately every three waking hours. Regular intake of food prevents blood sugar levels from dropping excessively, allowing energy levels to be maintained and food cravings to be avoided.

In order to eat well for energy and optimum performance it is important that you have a nutrition plan in place. This means preparing meals and snacks prior to leaving home, and being mindful of what and when you eat.

"A mentor is like having a personal trainer for your business"

4. PHYSICAL RECOVERY

It is vital that people establish a sleeping routine where they go to bed at the same time most nights and rise at approximately the same time each morning. This allows the body to form a regular sleep cycle pattern. I would suggest eight hours sleep a night to deliver optimal energy and performance. I am also a great believer in the power of regular massage for recovery, and regular holidays to maximise recuperation from work related stress.

5. MENTAL RELAXATION

We are not just physiological beings, we also have a mental side which controls how we perceive events and therefore how we react to them. It's important that we enjoy regular downtime away from things that cause us stress. This could be going to a sporting event, listening to music, practicing yoga or using deep breathing techniques.

Who are the role models or mentors that have inspired you along the way? What important lessons have you learnt from them?

A key role model for me was Trudie Balthazar, a manager of mine at the Melbourne City Baths whom I developed enormous respect for. She taught me some very important lessons about managing people. Prior to Trudie, I had other managers who were very systems-oriented; what Trudie taught me was that systems are only as good as the people who are operating them.

If people in leadership positions do not have a genuine understanding or interest in those they are leading then it's unlikely that people will follow them. This principle can be applied to personal trainers: they may have great technical knowledge and training methods but if they don't show genuine interest or care for their clients they will not keep them for long. They also won't get the same results as a trainer whose clients believe in them so much, they'll crawl over broken glass for them. Another for whom I have the greatest respect is Simone Whear, my wife.

Simone is the most amazing person I have ever met. She has taught me a lot about unconditional love and total support. She has made many sacrifices to allow me to grow my business while still playing cricket at a high level, and has supported me through decisions such as leaving a well paid, secure job as a health and fitness club manager for the unknowns of the business world. The biggest lesson I have learned from Simone is the need to have a support system around you to achieve optimum results - both in business and in one's personal life.

Ann Leslie, my grandmother, has been another amazing role model. I lived with her through my late teenage years and into my 20's, a time when young people can go off the rails a little. I am proud to say that I never once had an argument with Nan and am still amazed at the patience she showed me. Nan passed that patience onto me - an invaluable gift during frustrating times in business.

Lastly, I must mention Andrew May, my business mentor, who has shown me the unlimited opportunities that abound for those who seek them. He has shown me how valuable it is to have a mentor who can open our eyes to opportunities that we can't see for ourselves. I am also a big believer in "walking our talk", so as a business mentor to others I believe it would be hypocritical not to have one myself.

Were there any times when that you wanted to give up running your business? What got you through?

I love running my business, Career Fitness. However any businessperson who thinks there won't be testing times is living a fantasy.

For me one of those times came in 2007 when I found myself totally exhausted both physically and mentally. I was running Career Fitness; coordinating a team of 10 personal trainers for the City of Banyule; committing 20 hours a week to Preston, my subdistrict level cricket team; and trying to be a good father and husband.

I was already struggling to do justice to all these activities when the sucker punch came: an announcement that all Certificate III & IV in Fitness course providers like myself would be audited.

This meant going over reams and reams of paperwork to ensure we were adhering to the strict compliance rules associated with delivering a Nationally Accredited Training Package course. This mountain of paperwork along with the pressure I was feeling from my other commitments almost caused me to throw it all in. I felt overwhelmed and a little depressed that my life was out of control.

Fortunately though, these thoughts were only temporary and the audit went exceptionally well. However, the situation I'd found myself in taught me an important lesson about over committing. It prompted my decision to resign as the Personal Training Coordinator with the City of Banyule. I also put time and priority management strategies in place to ensure Career Fitness would grow while allowing me a life outside of work.

Today there are still challenges, however I feel better equipped than ever to manage them. This experience also gives me a great personal example I now use when mentoring clients and speaking to groups about priorities.

What person or event has had the biggest impact on your life and why?

The person who has had the biggest impact on my life is my dad, Barry. My mother, Cheryl, passed away just before my second birthday in 1971. Dad, still a young man, was left with the huge responsibility of bringing me up. He did this largely on his own in an era where single parent families were unusual. Now, as a father myself, I am starting to fully realise the sacrifices he made for me. I will be eternally grateful for the amount of time he spent teaching me life skills, playing games with me and supporting my sports. As you can imagine he was, and still is, my biggest fan, and I in turn am his.

What is one of the funniest things that has ever happened to you on your success journey?

The funniest thing that has happened to me was during my first ever job interview for a gymnasium instructor position in the early 1990's. It was an extremely hot 38 degree Melbourne day and at the time I was driving a 1971 Toyota Corolla which had no air conditioning. I hadn't had the foresight to pack a second set of clothes and by the time I reached the interview I was soaked with sweat.

Despite my water logged appearance I went on to win the position, but I will never forget walking in and seeing the look of disbelief on the face of one of the interviewers. That interviewer's name was Todd and he went on to become one of my best friends. Several years later Todd, who is always immaculately groomed, confided that he went to say something about my sweaty state to the gym manager. Thankfully, the manager cut him short with "Aaron will be a terrific addition to our team," and that was that.

What is one of the biggest mistakes you've ever made in your life and what did you learn from it?

My biggest mistakes actually came during a period that also brought me the greatest joy - the birth of my first son, Kayden. Simone and I had just purchased our first house and started Career Fitness, and now Simone was not going to be working for the next 18 months! As you can imagine this led to some financial pressure.

There are always more expenses than expected with a new home, especially one built from scratch as ours was. There was turf to buy, a TV aerial, clothes line, letter box, shed, curtains, carpet and more. The list went on and on. On top of that, the new business had its own unending list of purchase needs.

All this put us in a difficult financial situation, but the biggest mistake I made was to pay for a lot of those expenses on credit. Eventually, with high interest mounting, the debt got out of control.

I am pleased to say this situation has now been reversed, but only through much disciplined effort. It also taught me some really valuable lessons that I now use in my mentoring sessions; lessons such as the importance of budgeting and recording all expenditure, living on cash, and of course, controlling credit card debt.

Is there a significant quote(s) or saying which you live your life by?

"If exercise was a pill it would be the most widely prescribed medication in the world." This quote summarises how powerful exercise is, not only in terms of people wanting to change their body composition, but in terms of disease prevention and enjoying the highest quality life as we age. I have dedicated my working life to spreading this message and will continue to do so through as many different forums as I can.

How do you teach people to set and stick with their goals? Do you have any specific methods for changing behaviour?

Teaching people how to properly set and stick to their goals is one of the corner stones of my main message, the 'Game Plan'. The Game Plan is divided into five parts which address how to develop and stick to a goal, and how to reward successful goal achievement.

The five parts are:

Graphic – by this I mean that the goal must be very clear, e.g., "I am going to follow a gym-based exercise program for 12 weeks, spending 60 minutes at the gym three times a week".

Achievable – the requirements of the goal must be attainable. Using our gym example, each exercise session should be of an intensity that is challenging but not overwhelming.

Measurable – without measurement, there is no way to accurately track progress. With our gym program example, the details of each exercise session should be recorded so they can be used to review progress and success.

Executable – a goal without an end date is just a dream. There are many things in life that all of us would like to achieve, however it is only when we apply a deadline that we take deliberate action. Our gym example has an end date 12 weeks from commencement, at which time results would be reviewed.

Rewarded – the missing component when most people set goals is that of building in regular rewards. Having a reward at the end of our 12 week gym program is fine, but this is a long way down the track. My suggestion would be to brainstorm 12 smaller rewards, one for each week of training. This way there is something to look forward to at the end of each week's successful efforts. Eventually, the exercise habit will become intrinsic, putting an end to the need for these extrinsic rewards.

What specific things can people do to improve their attitude and outlook on a daily basis?

Daily exercise – Exercise has been shown to increase energy levels, release endorphins which give a feeling of euphoria, and have proven benefits in terms of decreasing stress and improving self-confidence. Adding exercise to your day cannot fail to improve your outlook on life.

Reading and questions – Read positive material and ask great questions. Many of the most successful people on the planet swear by the power of constantly putting positive material into their minds, and asking positive questions such as “What am I

grateful for today? And “Who loves me?” If you can ask and answer these questions with emotion they will put you in an excellent frame of mind and reinforce the fact that each of us has a lot to be grateful for.

Positive energy – Associate with people who radiate positive energy as this is literally contagious. It's great for self-esteem and positive thoughts. As part of this process it would also be a good idea to limit the amount of time spent with negative people – they will have the opposite effect and drain you of your energy.

There are some people who look at the world as ‘a glass half-empty’ and I find that after anything more than a few minutes in their presence I am drained. Then there are those people who make you feel like you can take on the world after you have been in their presence. I know which type of person improves my outlook on life.

Automobile university – It's amazing how much more knowledgeable and upbeat you become if you listen to information on motivation and your topics of interest. So every time you are in the car, put on an information CD instead of turning on the radio. The knowledge I have of my areas of expertise – health, fitness and business – has expanded exponentially since undertaking this practice.

Relaxation and sleep – It's very difficult to have a great attitude to life when you are constantly tired or stressed. My suggestion for reducing these factors is to incorporate activities such as a relaxing bath, regular bedtime, meditation and reading into your life. They will help you relax and establish regular sleeping habits.

As a health and fitness expert) what is the most common question you are asked and what is your answer to it?

The most common question I hear is, “How do I lose weight?” My philosophy on weight-loss is that it is simple but not easy. What I mean by this is that weight-loss

from a physiological perspective could not be any simpler: you must move more and eat less. In doing so you'll take in fewer calories than you expend, putting your body into a state of negative calorie balance. When this happens the body will burn stored fat to top up the energy it requires.

However, a large proportion of the population are either overweight or obese, so weight-loss is obviously not that easy. This means there are psychological issues to consider as well if we are to get someone into a state of negative calorie balance.

The reason so many people fail to reach their weight-loss objectives is that they do not have a specific Game Plan. An effective Game Plan would include goal setting and rewards for physical activity, and sticking to a tailored eating plan. This organised, planned approach to weight-loss is the difference between programs that work, and ones that don't translate into real world results.

You've been working as a teacher and educator in the fitness industry for a number of years. What made you decide on this vocation?

My first experience teaching fitness students came in 1997 when I was asked to fill in for someone on the topic of exercise programming.

I really enjoyed passing on my knowledge to the next wave of fitness industry professionals, and the feedback from the class must have been good as I was invited back to take other topics. It was during those sessions that I discovered my passion for teaching and for impacting positively on fitness instructors coming through the education system.

Career Fitness is one of Victoria's leading fitness educators. What do you do that has made a real difference to the growth of your business in a highly competitive market?

Career Fitness partners with the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) in Melbourne to deliver nationally accredited Certificate III and Certificate IV in Fitness courses. A Certificate III in Fitness qualification is the minimum for those wanting a career as a gym instructor, group exercise instructor or aqua instructor. The Certificate IV in Fitness course provides the minimum qualification for those wanting to become a personal trainer. There are many people interested in doing fitness courses. However, there are also a large number of fitness course providers which makes for a very competitive market place.

At Career Fitness we work hard to create points of difference against our competitors which include the following:

We use a low pressure sales system. Unlike some of our competitors I think we have this mix right. We provide all the details about our services, facilities and prices upfront through our websites, brochures and information sessions; we don't lock our students into long-term contracts; and we don't use high pressure sales tactics or 'stalk' students who express an interest in our courses.

Instead, we encourage all those making enquiries to attend an information session where they can come in and find out more. There we explain the content of the courses and they can see both the style and the passion of our lecturers first hand. If a student is not able to attend an information session they are sent a DVD which highlights the features of the courses and the benefits of studying with us.

We also teach with passion. Every single member of the Career Fitness teaching staff is absolutely passionate about their area of expertise. It is our mission as a group to constantly raise industry standards, not just by producing instructors, but

by producing outstanding instructors. Each member of the teaching staff is actively involved in the fitness industry which means that students get the most up to date information. This is extremely important in such a dynamic industry.

We pride ourselves on first class customer service and we keep in touch with all current and past students via our monthly Career Fitness newsletter. Our newsletter contains a host of valuable technical content, business tips, and employment opportunities. Career Fitness also holds regular social and educational events where current and past students can continue to network and learn.

Most students are delighted with their fitness course experience. This leads to a huge number of new students coming to us directly through word of mouth referral. I think this is the ultimate feedback on the quality of our courses. However, we are always looking to improve and ask for both verbal and written feedback during and after every student intake.

Lastly, our students are invited to become Career Fitness members. This entitles them to a whole host of benefits such as a CD on how to attract and keep personal training clients, our quarterly magazine, and access to a members-only section on the website full of invaluable information. Those who are really serious about starting a business or taking their existing business to the next level can also continue their education via the Game Plan Mentorship program.

Explain your concept of having a 'Game Plan', why this is so important and the types of programs you now run for some of Australia's leading companies.

The Game Plan concept evolved from looking back over my business and life experiences and pinpointing the common thread running through all the successful times. I found that whenever I had achieved success there was always a plan in place that has allowed it to occur, and whenever things had not gone well it was often the result of poor planning.

I believe this is true for most people. We all know that “if we fail to plan then we plan to fail”, however planning still remains one of those things we don't do enough of.

I preach the Game Plan message using a combination of tools and experience to ensure my clients not only set appropriate plans but also follow them through.

I believe that success does not come by accident and that to achieve what you are truly capable of you must have a Game Plan that accounts for the following:

1. Learning – personal development and business development are directly linked, so address your ongoing education. After all, the more you learn the more you earn.

2. Earning – focus on the areas of sales, marketing and client retention as well as developing and refining your business-specific systems. Attention to these areas will contribute to increased cash flow.

3. Conserving – regardless of your income, the key to wealth is spending less than you earn and investing the rest. Have an organised savings and investment plan, allow for tax, and understand the difference between profit and cash flow.

4. Preserving – preserve both your mental and physical health. Put in place strategies for relaxation, getting adequate sleep, taking regular holidays, and optimising the results you get from your physical exercise program.

You also coach and mentor a number of fitness trainers and health professionals on how to grow their business and make more money.

What do the most successful trainers do to really stand out?

Customer service is usually the difference between trainers who succeed and trainers who don't. Delivering a good quality personal training session is every client's basic expectation, so take that as the baseline - it's the customer service around those physical sessions that provides your point of difference.

Some customer service strategies that the many successful trainers use include:

A welcome pack – clients are often spending a substantial sum up-front, or are entering a periodic direct debit contract on the basis of a result they are hoping to achieve in the future. As we live in an instant gratification society, my advice is to give clients something tangible at the point of sale to help positively reinforce their purchase decision. The simple act of giving a backpack containing some merchandise, educational articles or fitness equipment tends to reduce ‘buyer’s regret’ and will separate you from personal trainers who don’t do this.

Reminder calls – trainers that take the time to confirm appointments save themselves from a lot of cancellations. It also shows the client that you care about them.

Setting homework – many personal trainers make the mistake of delivering a great session once or twice a week but not following up with their clients outside these times. You are doing yourself and your clients a disservice if you don’t set homework or follow them up outside of session times. Homework should include specific exercise prescriptions – cardiovascular training, resistance training, flexibility exercises and group exercise classes that are appropriate to their training goals. Other homework tasks should include a focus on incidental exercise and diet.

Follow up – whether this takes the form of a phone call, e-mail or SMS doesn’t really matter, but follow up contact is vital. For a new client this may be a call to reassure them that it’s normal to feel sore after the first workout and that this will get better as their body adapts to training. For an experienced client this may be to check that you have worked them hard enough. Successful trainers also communicate, educate and interact with clients via a regular newsletter, as well as educational and social events.

What are your thoughts on new trends that will shape the health and wellbeing industry over the next few years?

The wellness revolution will continue as more and more ageing Baby Boomers realise there is a product on the market that not only makes them feel younger, but also look younger too. That product, of course, is exercise.

I also see greater recognition from both the medical fraternity and governments of fitness professionals and the role they can play in preventative health. Australia is in the midst of a health care crisis across all age categories. The World Health Organisation even believes we are faced with an obesity epidemic. I think we will see employer incentives, and tax and insurance rebates, to encourage us to maintain our health and fitness in the future. This will mean greater acceptance and respect concerning what fitness professionals can offer in terms of optimising health.

Longer does not always mean better in the eyes of the client, so time efficient workouts will become critical. Many clients who use a personal trainer are willing to pay as much or more if they can get similar results in less time. In fact many clients who use a personal trainer don’t really want the training itself, they just want the results. This concept is similar to a home loan. Not too many people wake up one morning wanting to put themselves into debt for 25 years but they do want what a home loan offers – a house of their own.

Lastly, the internet is here to stay so rather than fight technology the fitness industry needs to embrace it. Online personal training is one example of how this technology can allow many people to experience the benefits of personal training at a fraction of the price.

From a business perspective what can personal trainers do to differentiate themselves from the competition?

In addition to an emphasis on customer service, here are some other key points to focus on:

Passion and energy – there is a saying that you cannot fake passion. Outstanding personal trainers have a real love for what they do and are passionate about helping their clients achieve their goals. When you are doing something that you love you cannot help but be energised. This compares very favourably against average trainers who are merely going through the motions.

Complimentary sessions – let potential clients take you for a test drive, but also have a system in place that maximises your ability to make a sale at the end of it.

Sales – successful personal trainers are either good at sales or employ someone who can do this for them. You may be the best technical trainer in the world but that's of no use if you have no paying clients.

Administration – most personal trainers are great with people but not good at administration. You need to handle cancellations, emergency situations, employment, cash handling, and so on, or hire someone to manage them for you.

Reporting – your business should have a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) against which performance can be measured. These results should be reported on and assessed.

Marketing and tracking – trainers must know how to market themselves and how to track the results of that marketing. It is results that determine whether marketing efforts have been an expense or an investment.

Organisation – as a personal trainer it is very rare for any two weeks to be the same. Clients get sick and go on holidays, or you may pick up new clients. You need to plan out your week in advance so you can maximise non-training time for administration or relaxation.

Why is business mentoring so powerful?

Every elite sportsperson has a coach or mentor to accelerate their development as well as point out weaknesses that need to be worked on. It should be the same in the competitive world of business.

Many business owners find it very difficult to stay up to date with both the changes in their industry and the endless innovations in sales, marketing, retention and management strategies. All this means that having a mentor is no longer a luxury but a necessity for outstanding performance.

A mentor is like having a personal trainer for your business. They help you devise a specific Game Plan then keep you accountable to it, ensuring you take action every day towards achieving your aims.

The reason I am such a huge advocate of business mentoring is that it has taken years off the time I originally needed to achieve my financial goals. It has helped me accelerate my business growth at a rapid rate as I have been able to learn from my mentor and not repeat his mistakes. Now I really enjoy helping other fitness professionals achieve the financial success that I have been able to achieve.