

CONNECT FOR SUCCESS

What if effective coaching is also a means of connecting? In other words, sometimes coaching is a form of connecting and sometimes connecting is a form of coaching. Is it possible that these teaching essentials overlap in such a way that one is a prerequisite to being truly effective at the other? Maybe helping participants be more successful in class is not as much about doing a better job of coaching them as it is about doing a better job of connecting with them. In fact, connecting with participants is one of the most important things an instructor can do. Connecting helps ensure that participants *feel empowered and motivated* by their exercise experiences rather than intimidated and overwhelmed.

Some effective connecting techniques that are discussed during initial training include arriving early, being prepared, learning peoples' names, smiling, and making eye contact, among other things. These are all important ways to make participants feel welcome, but there are more.

Think about this – there is another layer of coaching that inherently increases our connection with participants. This layer goes beyond simply ensuring a friendly and welcoming experience to ensuring that participants *feel* like they are having a *highly successful exercise experience*. This coaching-connecting combination is about meeting participants where they are on a given day. Are they new to class, are they new to fitness in general, are they working towards any specific goals? It is important to be TRULY present to what is going on in class, and delivery strategies should be a little bit different as a result. In fact, even if exactly the same participants are in class from day to day, every class will still be a little different based on things like where a release is in its Shelf Life, the time of year and even how participants are feeling on a given day.

Coaching Versus Connecting

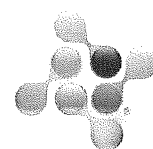
In general, coaching includes things like describing the programming, proper execution and the layout of the workout. This coaching material is a feature of almost every class. Connecting includes all of the things that make participants feel welcome, like learning names, arriving early, staying after class, smiling and so on. Combining coaching with connecting is what makes the things done and said in class unique to that day's class experience! It makes each class experience a personal one that is customized for the participants in the room. They should feel as if they are being spoken to directly, to their truth, to their reality, and to their needs as opposed to the instructor seeming to check boxes on a coaching and connecting to-do list.

For example, technique corrections are less valuable when no one in the room is exhibiting a technique problem, and it does not make sense for an instructor lying on his or her back looking at the ceiling to tell the participants that they look great. Participants know when the instructor is simply going down a list of things to say and not giving much attention to what is actually happening in the room. An instructor that does not react to the environment could very easily be replaced by a DVD. One of the great benefits of group fitness is the fact that the instructor is in the room and can tailor the experience to the needs of the class.

Think about this – delivering a completely customized-to-the-room experience is a means of CONNECTING!!! Certainly the programming, the execution and the layout of the workout will be described, but this is done based on what the class needs, not on what has been decided ahead of time. For example, if several participants were having difficulty with a movement or a combination, then pushing them to work harder would not be the best approach. Reassessing the coaching strategy, trying something different to help the participants be more successful, would be the way to go. On the flipside, if everyone in the class were very successful with the movements, then continuing to harp on execution and programming would not help participants have their most successful experience. Coaching should shift gears to help participants maximize their fitness benefits. In other words, coaching is situational based on the instructor's connection with the class.

Increasing Participation

Increasing participation does not necessarily mean making P.A. announcements or talking to members when



they are on the cardio equipment about trying class. Certainly these approaches can help, but classes should be taught in a more inclusive fashion that appeals to a broader audience, making them more accessible to a larger number of participants.

Think about this – what if someone who had never taken class before, or any class before, decided to peek in one day? What would they see? Would they see a “damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead” class delivery, or would they see something different? Would they want to participate and aspire to do the things they saw, or would they be intimidated by what they saw?

Creating Broader Appeal

First of all, the programming in the program notes is designed for the average participant for a program. While this is certainly a large number of people, there are still many participants and potential participants that fall outside of this average range. The question becomes how to appeal to those participants, and potential participants, that are outside of the average.

One big weapon in the coaching arsenal is options. Coaching options is an extremely important part of meeting participants where they are physically. This can take on a variety of forms and varies between all of the BTS programs, but options are the tool for tailoring the intensity of the workout to the participants in the class.

Think about this – options are the key to broader appeal. Options are a way to CONNECT! There are a variety of ways that options can be presented, but keep in mind that, for the most part, participants that want to work hard and really push themselves will do so no matter what. The participant to be most concerned with is the “fragile egg.” This term describes the participant that is new to group fitness, to exercise in general, or even the one on the back side of the bell shaped curve. If this participant gets pushed too hard too soon, they may crack and never return.

A “fragile egg” participant might be struggling with the intensity or some physical aspect of the workout. They can easily be intimidated by the workout and be left thinking, “I’ll never be able to do that.” Options are the way of giving these participants a physical relief valve. They may need a break but may not take one unless that option is offered. From an instructor perspective, this means actually role modeling the options, not just talking about them. In fact, it means living in the options, not just giving a quick peek. Living in the options means showing an option and staying with it. It means returning to options throughout a track and throughout a workout.

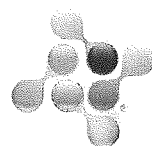
It is not enough, in most cases, to just show the option at the beginning of a track and then push hard the rest of the way. For option coaching to be effective, the options have to be revisited, and for longer than the blink of an eye. If a high-energy portion of a track is 64 counts, then the option might be coached for 32 counts. In a later section, the option might even be coached for the whole 64 counts.

Living in the options truly condones them as a supported, encouraged way to approach the workout. Skimming over the options, failing to commit and failing to role model them does not truly give the impression that they are a valid choice. The options end up looking like an afterthought or another box that needs to be checked off the coaching list.

For instructors, living in the options might seem like cheating the workout; however, the goal should not be a successful personal workout but a successful participant workout. Another goal should be to make the class participants more effective exercisers. Knowing how to option the workout is a big part of that exercise intelligence. Think about this – living in the options connects a class experience with a wider more varied audience. This equals greater class numbers!

Don’t Swing The Pendulum Too Far!

Just as a class can seem too challenging if there are no options, it can seem unchallenging if too many options are presented. Molly-coddling participants should be avoided. Class participants are adults and should be treated as such. While they want information, they do not need to have their hands held. In most cases participants come to class or seek out fitness advice because they like the physical and emotional



push that they get, so there should still be an element of challenge in the class delivery. How much challenge will be based on the information gained from connecting with the class. Think about this – while it is important to live in the options, the class delivery should not only live there. Options are not about checking in to the “take it easy hotel.”

Something else to consider, an instructor standing in front of a class and announcing that they are taking it easy because it is their fourth class of the week is not “living in the options.” They are letting the class down. Participants bought the same tickets to the show as did the participants in the first class of the week. The tickets are not discounted because the instructor is tired or in poor form.

Be Proactive

Long story short, instructors should not be passive observers in class. They should be proactive teachers that affect the outcome for participants, both physically and emotionally. What if feedback from class indicated that it was too hard, too easy, too complex, or too simple? This should not be considered a problem with the program. All of the BTS programs are extensively tested during development and potential issues are addressed prior to their release. This feedback should lead to an evaluation of how to present the class differently to create a more positive outcome. Instructors have tremendous ability to affect the perception of a track through their teaching effectiveness.

Think about this – if participants say class is too hard, can the delivery live in the options more? If participants say class is too easy, can the delivery include more motivation and more information to inform and show participants how to work harder? If participants say class is too complex, can the coaching be adjusted to find a more effective strategy? If participants say the class is too simple, are there other coaching elements that can be layered on to create depth or can the coaching simply encourage really going for it physically?

Options Versus Changing The Programming

Possibly one of the downsides of the pre-choreography model is the feeling of disempowerment to make the right choice for the participants on club level. Instructors wonder, “am I allowed to do it if it is not written in the notes?” It is important to clarify what an option is, in contrast to changing the programming. Most often an option is a reduction of complexity and or intensity of a given move or sequence. This is always acceptable. In fact, it is encouraged. What is not acceptable or promoted is a “re-programming” of the choreography. Re-programming would result in an inconsistent experience for participants from class to class and from club to club.

Options are listed in the program notes and can be found on the Education Resources DVD. Some general options for the programs include the following.

For Group Active:

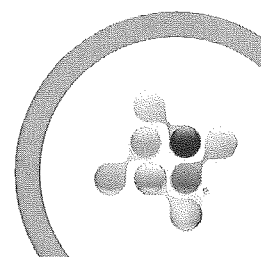
- See Group Step options for Cardio
- See Group Power options for Strength

For Group Centergy:

- Optional poses (e.g. Knee-Chest-Chin vs. Crocodile)
- Reduced range of motion
- Physical assists (e.g. use hands to assist a Pilates Roll Up)
- Return to any previous options

For Group Core:

- Skip repetitions
- Reduce range of motion
- Modify positions or exercises
- Stay with previous options rather than progressing



For Group Groove:

- Reduce complexity by leaving out things like turns
- Remain grounded when movements elevate off the floor
- Reduce range of motion for movements
- Reduce amount of ground covered on the floor

For Group Kick:

- Remain grounded
- Lower and/or shorter range of motion
- Less strike intensity
- Skip repetitions

For Group Power:

- Remove weight part way through a track
- Omit repetitions
- Decrease range of motion
- Safely "cheat" a rep or two

For Group Ride:

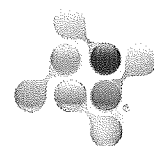
- Remain in the saddle during Standing Climb
- Reduce the duration of intense sections by pulling back early
- Reduce the resistance on the wheel
- Slow the pace during faster sections or anytime one feels it is necessary

For Group Step:

- Execute movements on the floor rather than on the STEP
- Simplify a movement or combination
- Remain grounded during sections that elevate off of the STEP or the floor
- Adjust the STEP height
- Omit the arm movements and simply focus on the footwork

Also, participants do not have to stay for the whole class. It seems like a funny thing to say, but they should feel like they have permission to leave whenever they need to or want to. They can simply be encouraged to do a little more each time they return as they build fitness and confidence.

None of these options change the programming intent of a track, they simply moderate the intensity so that participants can feel more successful. Over time participants will build strength and fitness and may become less reliant on some of the options. In fact, this is a great indicator of progress for participants. Any progress or fitness gains should be acknowledged when they are noticed. This type of connection is a very powerful motivator that will send participants' perceived success soaring.





Most of a Group Ride class is spent turning up the resistance. Any cue used repetitiously can sound monotonous quickly. Here are some cues you can use to beef up your coaching arsenal.

RIDE

Resistance Cues

- ▶ Add fuel to the fire
- ▶ Make the mountain grow
- ▶ On a resistance scale of 1 to 10, this should be a 5
- ▶ Double whatcha got
- ▶ Here's where the challenge begins
- ▶ Bring on the big boys
- ▶ Roll right until you're about to slow down
- ▶ Add a gear
- ▶ Turn it to burn it
- ▶ Give it a little tug
- ▶ Take a little air out of the tires
- ▶ Off the pavement and into the sand
- ▶ Dial in
- ▶ Put some more incline in that hill
- ▶ Clock in, it's time to go to work
- ▶ Feel the wind on your chest
- ▶ Make it matter
- ▶ Get outside your comfort zone
- ▶ Small load changes equal big results
- ▶ Test your limit
- ▶ Give me a whopper size turn
- ▶ Keep the speed but increase the power
- ▶ Crank it up
- ▶ Make the headwind stronger
- ▶ Adjust your base
- ▶ Make a deposit
- ▶ Add some heat before you leave the seat
- ▶ To increase your pension, add some tension
- ▶ Turn up the volume
- ▶ Take it to the next level
- ▶ Get a little more load
- ▶ The mountain is getting steeper
- ▶ Push the pressure
- ▶ Wind up
- ▶ Add one for the carrot cake





Instructors can also suggest that some new participants just stay for as much of the class as they feel comfortable. There are many BTS licensed clubs who offer participants the option of staying for just three or four tracks and then leaving. When offering this plan, instructors should coach them to cool down a bit before they go. This gives participants a great feel for the experience without them feeling unsuccessful or intimidated. Participants, especially new participants, should never feel like they have to stay for the whole class. Getting up to leave, or getting up to step away from their bike, is always an option.

It might sound awkward, but a sore butt is one of the biggest barriers for some participants. In fact, it's one of the biggest complaints in cycling classes. This soreness is simply a matter of pressure from the saddle. Because a bicycle seat is built so low, one might feel more isolated pressure on and around the tailbone. Actually, this seat design is purposeful as it allows legs to move in a circular motion necessary for pedaling, but it is still uncomfortable until one gets used to it.

A helpful suggestion is for instructors to carry an extra gel seat cover in their gym bag, or have the club get extras for the room. While this might not alleviate the discomfort entirely, it will help and it will show new participants that Group Ride instructors care about their individual success. Instructors can assure new participants that they will get used to the pressure over time.

After the class has begun, it's time to begin coaching the basics of execution. Most instructors are capable of delivering extensive coaching advice on proper riding positions. Keep in mind that a new participant can only digest so much information at one time, so instructors should not overwhelm them with knowledge. A great coaching strategy is to hit the basics of execution at the beginning of a track, and then layer in information as participants get a feel for the class. It's important to note that not all participants will have perfect technique. Connect with participants, coach them to success and give them praise as they improve their technique. At the same time, give participants a little space to discover the workout for themselves.

Managing Intensity in Group Ride

There are essentially two things that change the physical intensity of a Group Ride class: resistance and pace. In other words, resistance combined with pace determines the intensity of the workout. If someone wants to decrease the intensity of the workout, either reduce the resistance or slow the pace. That said, reducing the resistance is always an option for moderating the intensity, but there should still be enough resistance on the bike to maintain proper execution.

Managing Intensity: Standing Climb

A common execution problem that new participants have is not applying enough resistance on the wheel to move into Standing Climb safely. Since resistance is needed for proper execution during the climbing sections of a track, instructors should emphasize the idea that resistance can be reduced on flatter sections of the class terrain.

During Standing Climb sections, it is better to encourage participants to simply slow down rather than to back off the resistance. Slowing will reduce the intensity while allowing them to maintain proper execution through appropriate resistance. Staying in the saddle is always a good option as well. For the new participant, the Standing Climb sections are often quite challenging because they are holding their bodyweight in a standing position while cycling under load.

When seated, the upper leg muscles - the quadriceps, hamstrings and glutes - do most of the work. In standing climb, calf muscles are also recruited as the weight shifts to the balls of the feet. To illustrate this idea of muscle recruitment, compare pedaling uphill on the toes versus doing a squat with weight heavy in the heels. Thus, to remove some of the muscular intensity, staying in the saddle is always a great option for new participants.

Managing Intensity: Faster Pace

Faster pace may also be quite difficult for a newer participant, especially maintaining a faster pace for an extended period of time. New participants should be encouraged to go at their own pace, especially for their first few classes. Instructors should coach that the goal is to ride the rhythm, but that cycling is a specific





GROUP

RIDE™

Instructors should always emphasize to ride the rhythm with proper pedaling technique and increase the pace as long as this technique can be maintained. Technique should not be sacrificed for pace. Remind participants that fitness is a process and not to be in a hurry. Riding the entire workout at a slower pace to get a lay of the land is a great option for a new participant, and slowing the pace to recover and regain proper execution is always the right option for any participant.

Instructors can encourage new participants to moderate their workout by role modeling options. For example, by the instructor stating "it's okay to back off here," and then demonstrating that option gives participants the permission to pull back too. Alternatively, if the instructor does not role model the options, participants might feel uncomfortable taking them - even if they need to! Remember, the role of a great coach is to ensure the success of the team.

Everyone Finishes First!

The key to a participant's perceived success in Group Ride is when he or she is able to take ownership of their workout. Instructor coaching plays a huge role in achieving this success. Instructors should reinforce the fact that participants are working at their own intensity and that it is always okay to leave if they feel the need, no matter what the experience level. Helping to remind participants that it's not important how hard the person on the bike next to them is working will encourage participants to ride for their level of fitness. Participants should strive to work at a challenging intensity based on their individual fitness level. When coached effectively, participants of any level can achieve improved cardiovascular fitness, an increase in leg strength, and improved endurance.

