



REVIEW PAPER

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS FOR FITNESS TRAINERS

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Abstract

This article is only the first step in exploring the professional ethics of fitness trainers in Latvia. Marking the discourse, looking at the theoretical frameworks and concepts, and identifying the situation are its basic elements. The next stage will be the analysis of information about the experience in other countries and primarily the Baltic countries, their comparison, discussion, conclusions, and suggestions for a more successful practice of professional ethics. Professional ethics for fitness trainers constitute a part of their professional competence, which shapes, determines and evaluates their professional activities from the perspective of ethical attitudes. The profession of a fitness trainer reflects health as a fundamental value, which sets the meaning of their professional activity as one that promotes and maintains health. This article examines the basic elements of professional ethics of fitness trainers. Their presentation in a single and logically structured form is an innovation in the literature on fitness trainers. Providing this type of information to future fitness trainers in Latvia is not only a necessary but also an urgent task. The article discusses in detail the concept of health lifestyle, the basic behavioral health lifestyles that are characteristic of the Latvian population. Fitness trainers need this background information to better fulfil their function as educators. The aim of the study is to examine the current situation regarding codes of professional ethics and literature on professional ethics for fitness trainers and based on the literature analysis, to identify the main elements of professional ethics: levels of moral regulation, basic principles of ethics, codes, the issue of responsibility, tolerance and autonomy, trainer-client relationships, as well as the trainer's relationship with other professionals.

The article also examines the types of normative ethics (deontological, utilitarian, virtue ethics) required for ethical decision-making.

Key words: *health, professional ethics, values, ethical principles, codes.*

Introduction

Sport, in all its forms, is a universal phenomenon. Character formation is linked to more than just the socialization process. People with a well-developed character can make independent choices and judgements and are endowed with willpower. Sport undoubtedly contributes to the development of character. Character traits such as determination, cooperation, willpower, endurance, courage, self-restraint, perseverance, and loyalty are among those mentioned most often as such that can be trained and developed through the challenges of sport. The concept and practice of sport are linked to commonly accepted concepts, ethical principles, and moral values.

For fitness trainers, just as for other professionals, it is essential to observe standards of professional activity and behaviour that define and at the same time help to achieve professional goals in the context of the client's interests. In other words – to become a successful professional in their chosen field. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have sufficient knowledge not only of the profession in which they specialize, but also of professional ethics and the ability to apply them in practice.

Theories of normative ethics. Fitness trainers inevitably must deal with ethical issues in their professional activities. Moreover, the issues are always specific to the context and the individual nature of the situation. Often these are questions that need to be answered not in general terms of “What should I do?” but rather “What should I do in this particular case to meet the interests of this patient/client?” This means that they must seek answers to specific questions that are related to ethics. In order to accomplish this and to respond with appropriate solutions, fitness trainers should respond with ethical judgements based on ethical theories. In this situation, ethical theories are useful in offering a multiplicity of responses to the inevitably new, ethically problematic situations.

Is ethics in sport just a matter of following the rules and applying them fairly? There are a number of important questions with difficult answers that can help to illustrate the relationship between sports and morality. In the search for solutions to questions and ethical considerations related to sport ethics, it is important to clarify the main moral theories that are an essential supporting tool.

Normative ethical issues do not seek to describe the situation precisely, but rather to determine how a given situation should be handled.

The essence of a normative ethical response is revealed in the desire to evaluate and recommend; not to make people more ethical, but to help people make better decisions. Normative ethical theories seek to explain what principles, reasons and values should guide our actions in specific sporting situations. Several types of approaches can be distinguished in dealing with normative issues. With regard to the question “What is the morally right thing to do?” we can answer it in a number of different ways, depending on the theory we choose. On the one hand, this creates the opportunity to ask additional questions about the situation of interest; on the other hand, by offering a variety of possible answers, it makes it possible to choose the most appropriate solution.

There are more types of ethical beliefs than can be listed in a single article. This paper will highlight three normative ethical theories which, when used alone or in combination, can provide a multifaceted analysis of dilemma situations.

One of these is *virtue ethics*, which emphasises the need to focus on the good throughout life. Here, the basic ethical question is “What should I be as a human being?” What virtues of character should I develop and how should I live by them.

The second is *deontology*, which focuses on the quality of our actions. Here the basic ethical question is “What should I do as a human being?” What type of actions should be performed (or avoided)? The third, *teleology*, calls for maximising the good. Here the basic ethical question is “What kind of action would maximize human happiness?”

Each of these ethical beliefs is linked to a value system. “For virtue ethics, the good is the achievement of excellence in thought, action, and character. For Kant’s ethics (as one of the most prominent examples of deontological ethics), human dignity and its central aspect, good will, are the most important (though not the only) values; and good will is primarily concerned with governing intentions – specifically those that determine one’s life plans, which correspond to the categorical imperative. For classical utilitarianism, pleasure and suffering are the basic positive and negative values” (Audi, 2007, 120). Each of the ethical beliefs can play an important role in promoting the good life. Just as it plays an important role in the process of finding solutions to ethical dilemmas.

Deontology (*deontos*) is a Greek word meaning ‘duty’ and represents the view that the *means* justify the *ends*. In contrast, the Greek word *teleos* means ‘purpose’. Thus, teleological moral theory holds that the *end* justifies the *means* (Schlabach, Peer, 2020, 186).

Deontological ethical theories focus on the characteristics of actions rather than their consequences. They ask what our moral obligations are in

particular circumstances or under general rules of conduct. Basic moral duties are equated with rights and that which is good.

Teleological ethics is most commonly known as utilitarianism or consequentialism. As its name suggests, teleological ethics focuses on the consequences of actions and thus seeks to find the rules, principles and actions that produce the greatest balance of good and bad. If the consideration of such consequences is directed towards the good of the individual, we arrive at a position called 'ethical egoism'. If such consequences are assessed in terms of the maximum good for all concerned, the theory is called utilitarianism.

Utilitarian ethical theories focus mainly on the consequences of actions. It asks what action or rule creates the greatest balance between good and evil. It equates the morally good with some notion of pleasure or happiness.

Unlike normative, action-based theories, which focus on duty and consequences, virtue ethics centre around the character traits of the moral agent and the consistency of the associated behaviour (habit). "Virtue ethic theories argue that ethics should primarily promote the development of moral character. It is suggested that the cultivation of virtue and the pursuit of excellence in all its possible forms are essential to good character" (Morgan, 2007, XXV).

Moral regulation. Like any other professional activity, the actions of a fitness trainer are subject to moral regulation on at least three levels. At the lowest level, it is the *restraint*, or refusal to act in a way that does not comply with rules (submission to moral requirements). This is followed by the achievement of *uniformity* of action, thanks to which it is possible to predict moral behaviour. The unification of moral behaviour constitutes the ethos of the professional – a set of distinctive features of the profession, defined by values and norms, beliefs that have stood the test of time. Professionals must conform to these if they are to achieve certain professional goals.

And the highest, but also the most complex level of moral regulation is *coordination* – the harmonisation of relationships. At all three levels, moral knowledge is necessary, in particular a code of ethics, because it is the basis for restraint, unification and coordination. The professional's activity is therefore characterised by external parameters: a certificate, a licence, proof of education, etc., as well as internal parameters: internal moral regulators – self-criticism, self-discipline, self-respect, etc. Professional ethics for fitness trainers is specific in that it combines elements of several ethical approaches. It is essentially a motivational communication ethic, but on the other hand it is a leadership ethic, which requires the trainer to be an authority, to be a leader in the relationship with the client. This means that the fitness trainer is

in fact playing a dual role: he respects the interests and needs of the client, but he is in the lead as far as choice of strategy and methodology is concerned. By analogy with the doctor-patient relationship, the fitness trainer is the person with professional knowledge, while the client is the layman (the person without such knowledge).

Ethics of communication. Any person or group that receives instructions from a certified fitness trainer is a client. Of course, people need to know their own body and their physical capabilities, but this does not necessarily mean the ability to appreciate and develop these capabilities. That is the trainer's field of activity, the relationship between the client and the trainer.

The treatment of the client by the trainer must first of all be legally correct. This means that the client is dealt with by a *certified trainer* who has the necessary professional knowledge, which is updated throughout his or her professional career. A fitness club cannot be a special interest club in the sense that it is a gathering of people who share a common interest, but do not have sufficient knowledge not to be detrimental to the parties involved. Namely the health of the client and the reputation of the trainer. Secondly, this attitude must be *psychologically acceptable*. For this to happen, the trainer must have good communication skills rather than sufficient ones. Otherwise, the motivational and educational function cannot be realised. Thirdly, attitudes must be *appropriate with regard to professional goals*. The trainer can define the objectives to be achieved only if he has information about the client's state of health obtained before the training. It is desirable to be clear about the client's needs and expectations, which will help to develop an appropriate and realistic training plan. Fourthly, the attitude must be *morally sound* in the context of the situation. This means that the client is responsible for the truthfulness of the information provided, for withholding relevant information or for assuming that information is true, thereby taking responsibility for his/her own health, safety and for defining and achieving the desired goals in the training process. The client is the first to suffer from incomplete information. It is the moral responsibility of the client to provide truthful information about himself, his state of health or any problems in this respect. "The client of a fitness club should independently monitor his/her own health and inform the staff in time if his/her health deteriorates" – such a requirement can be made of the client in the internal rules of the sports club, not only in the code of ethics (Tornado, 2023). The client is responsible for the observance of contractual obligations, the observance of the club's internal rules, moral commitments (promises, verbal agreements, etc.), decisions taken, actions and behaviour in general, if he is an autonomous

person. The same honesty and responsibility that is expected of a client is also expected of the trainer.

Informed consent. In moral terms, this is a shared responsibility between two partners: the trainer and the client. Provided, of course, that the client is an autonomous person capable of *giving informed consent*. Autonomy is self-determination exercised by an adult, mentally healthy person. It means that a person is free to follow his or her own will, which in turn determines his or her behaviour. The next condition for autonomy is the ability to choose freely, i.e., to have a range of choices. Autonomy and freedom (freedom of choice) are correlative concepts. Thus, an autonomous person can be considered to be an adult whose behaviour involves a real choice between potential courses of action and an *understanding* of the consequences of the actions chosen (Seale, 1999). Respecting a person means recognising that another person is worthy of respect. In practical terms, this means taking into account the individual's gifts and potential for development; taking into account their opinions, choices and actions, provided this does not contradict the general rule that a mentally healthy person has the right to determine what is done with their body. As Joseph Raz points out: "In order for man to be autonomous, he needs to identify with and be loyal to his choices" (Raz, 2001).

Informed consent is conscious, obtained without deception or subterfuge (e.g., passing off what is desired as what is, or stating "We care about your figure"). In order to obtain informed consent, the client must be provided with a fairly wide range of information. Informed consent also covers data protection, i.e., the club commits to respect data protection as a privacy right of the customer. The professional is expected to respect the principle of confidentiality in terms of information and other data protection, the trainer must recommend dietary changes based solely on evidence-based opinions and guidelines for health reasons and the needs of the clients, regardless of any direct or indirect interest or benefit from the supplement company or other suppliers.

In order to obtain this informed consent, the information from the professional must be as complete as possible. As emphasised in the "97 Rules To Live By For Personal Trainers: A Code Of Ethics" – be so verbally thorough and descriptive in explaining your exercises that even a blind person can grasp the concept of what you expect them to do (Goodman, 2023).

Values and health lifestyles. The specific nature of the work of fitness trainers requires adherence to basic ethical principles as well as attention to value orientation issues. In the process of work, the values of the trainer are expressed through the active realisation of his/her values. It is important to

take into account that fitness trainers have great influence over the value orientation of the individuals they work with. This is particularly important when working with young people, as it is important to pay attention to and contribute to the development of young people's value orientations.

An individual's health behaviour is strongly influenced by his or her value system, which also includes health. A value is a relatively stable notion that gives an existential understanding regarding what patterns of behaviour are more important or desirable, and which are less important or undesirable. The relatively stable structure of such perceptions, organised on the basis of mutual comparison, is a value system. The relativity of values stems from the fact that, over the course of life, an individual's value system gradually changes according to the experience and circumstances in which they find themselves. At the same time, these changes are slow enough not to jeopardise the main function of the value system, namely, to serve as a frame of reference that determines people's attitudes, opinions, and actions. Existing values are closely linked to social, moral, economic, historical, political, religious, cultural and many other factors existing in parallel at a given time.

We tend to express man's, societies, and time's values in terms of judgement and determination, justification and choice, relationships, care for oneself (one's health) and the world. Values are what determine human behaviour. By pursuing or trying to pursue the values that are important to them, people express their attitudes about reality. Value orientation refers to an individual's active pursuit of various spiritual, material, vital or social values. An individual's concern (or lack of concern) for health is also an expression of an attitude based on existing values.

Fitness trainers need to be familiar with all basic health behaviour styles, and they must inform their clients about them, as well as find out which style is practised by the client. Data from the quality-of-life survey allow us to hypothesise that the Latvian population is characterised by five health lifestyles: not caring about their health (harmful lifestyle), minimally caring about their health, partially caring about their health, health-oriented lifestyle, and health-promoting lifestyle (Sīlis, 2010).

A health lifestyle promotes healthy behaviours that include physical activities and other parameters. The Fitness School, for example, sees it as the *mission* of a fitness trainer: "To contribute to the improvement of everyone's health and quality of life through strength training and a well-balanced diet" (Fitness School, 2023). The Fitness School singles out physical activity and nutrition among a wide range of health-promoting activities, self-critically acknowledging that there are many different factors that influence our overall health, but unfortunately not all of these factors are within our conscious influence and control.

Myfitness club, on the other hand, sees it as its mission to inspire, motivate and support people who want to make their everyday lives more active and healthier through regular exercise and movement. Their mission statement underlines the essence of the health and fitness profession, which is also the core of professional ethics (Myfitness, 2023).

A health lifestyle includes a set of behaviours chosen by an individual, combining a variety of possible health behaviours: smoking or not smoking, alcohol consumption, sports and exercise, dietary advice and many other preventive and health-promoting activities. Abel, Cockerham and colleagues offer the following definition of health lifestyles: “Health lifestyles comprise the interrelated patterns of health behaviours, orientations, and resources through which groups of individuals respond to their social, economic, and cultural environments” (Abel, 1991).

It follows from the theory of health lifestyles that “health lifestyles can be broadly characterised as either positive or negative” (Cockerham, 2005, 56). However, such a general characterisation does not necessarily imply that they are homogeneous, i.e. consisting only of health-promoting or only of health-harming practices. The ‘health behaviours chosen by a particular individual can have both positive and negative effects on the body and mind and, although the effects vary, they form a coherent pattern of health practices, i.e. a lifestyle’ (Cockerham, 1997). The data from the study support this theoretical assumption: none of the five health lifestyles of the Latvian population exclude all harmful habits (e.g. daily smokers can be found among all lifestyles). However, none of the lifestyles is absolutely harmful to health, as each of them includes health-care activities and health-preserving or health-promoting activities (Silis, 2010).

Data (Silis, 2010) support this theoretical position: none of the five health lifestyles of the Latvian population exclude all harmful habits. However, none of the lifestyles is absolutely harmful to health, as each of them includes some health-preserving or health-promoting activities.

The only one of the five lifestyles with which a health and fitness professional in Latvia should not interact is the lifestyle called “Not taking care of your health”. This lifestyle has the most pronounced harmful habits (risky use of alcohol, chronic smoking, etc.). Few of them engage in physical exercise on a short and occasional basis.

“Minimal health concerns” means that practitioners of this style have relatively few distinctly harmful habits, but also few health-enhancing activities. Almost a quarter of them exercise at least once a week or even every day for at least half an hour (Silis, 2022). It is clear from the style description that practitioners of this style work individually and rarely collaborate with fitness trainers. “Partial health care” – a controversial health

lifestyle characterised by strong negative habits alongside quite strong health promoting activities. Half (50%) of the respondents said that they exercise for at least 30 minutes once or several times a week to the point of light breathlessness or sweating (Sīlis, 2022).

A 'health promoting lifestyle' corresponds to people in good health, who regularly take part in sports activities and have the fewest, but still present, harmful habits. Their habits are characterised by avoidance of illnesses, more prudent food choices and a greater emphasis on health-enhancing activities. 6% of respondents listed extreme physical exercise at least once a week as their typical leisure-time activity. Two thirds (67%) exercise once or several times a week for at least 30 minutes to the point of light breathlessness or sweating (Sīlis, 2010).

Colleagues are treated ethically as co-workers – professionals similar to fitness trainers who work as employers, doctors, physiotherapists and other allied health professionals. This is necessary above all for the client, so that each client can benefit optimally from all professionals.

Codes of ethics, their structure, meaning and functions. The meaning of codes is open to interpretation, but in any case, no professional can do without the regulations laid down in codes, since both codes and professional etiquette are the means by which professional ethics are implemented. A code contains a number of constant elements, which vary according to the type of code: codes of ethics for individual trainers or group trainers. It is a systematic set of principles of professional ethics that are consistent with the professional role of the fitness trainer and the fundamental objective of improving the health of the client, which is why both international and regional codes are in force. For example, in describing the code as a regulatory normative document, the World Anti-Doping Code (2015) states that it is sufficiently detailed to achieve full coherence on issues where a common approach is needed, but it is also sufficiently general in other areas to allow flexibility in how the agreed anti-doping principles are implemented. The code has been developed with respect for the principle of proportionality and human rights. This creates the opportunity to use the code as a guide for practical action.

Most often, the preamble to the code states the purpose for which the code is to be developed and the tasks that will be undertaken to achieve that purpose. And the core values that will be put into practice by adhering to the requirements of the code. For the most part, the code contains the main principles, the rights, and duties of the professional, the responsibilities, the conditions for compliance with the code, and perhaps sanctions for breaches of the code. In addition, accountability is attached to compliance with the principles as well as the rights and obligations. Professional associations shall

supervise the establishment of and compliance with the codes. Codes are sometimes made up solely of principles, which are norms expressed in a generalised and/or prescriptive form. A code is therefore a set of principles in a systematic form. Principles also tend to be defined in law. For example, in Latvia, the four main principles that are relevant to sports are contained in Article 3 of the “Law on Sports”:

1. *the principle of equality*, which states that everyone has the right to take part in sports.
2. *the principle of fair play*, which states that the educational, organisational and management of sports must be guided by the Olympic ideal and ethical principles, and must combat dishonesty and doping in sport, as well as physical and moral impropriety.
3. *the principle of safety*, which requires that sporting events are held in a safe environment and are organised and managed by qualified sports personnel.
4. *the principle of good governance*, which requires that the organisation and management of sport is based on democratic governance structures, clear objectives, fair procedures, openness, cooperation with stakeholders, effective and sustainable regulation, and clear levels of oversight and accountability (Law on Sports, 2002).

These principles can be applied to the professional activities of fitness trainers. The authors believe that *the principle of safety should be considered as a key principle*. And only then the principles of equality, fair play and good governance. Failure to comply with the safety principle may result in damage to the client’s health, for which the trainer may be held legally and ethically liable. Respect for the principle of safety also implies the practice of the principle of non-harming. The IDEA Code of Ethics for Personal Trainers states that:

- the primary responsibility of the personal trainer is the safety, health and well-being of the client; never compromise this responsibility for self-interest, personal gain or monetary gain.
- products or services should be recommended only if they will benefit the client’s health and well-being, not because they will benefit you financially or professionally (IDEA, 2023).

The fact that few codes of ethics are available in the public domain in Latvia does not mean that there are no regulatory codes of ethics. Latvia is a member of the European Register of Fitness trainers (EREPS, 2023), whose code is also binding for fitness trainers practising in Latvia. The code comprises four principles: rights, obligations, personal responsibility and professional standards. The principle of rights requires respect for individual differences, non-discrimination and non-disclosure of client information.

Compliance with the principle of commitment requires that fitness trainers build and maintain relationships with clients based on openness, honesty, mutual trust and respect. Personal responsibility is primarily for the safety of clients, knowledge of the legal aspects of cooperation, high standards of personal and environmental hygiene, non-judgmental attitude to the use of illicit drugs or other prohibited performance-enhancing drugs. The professional standard requires active pursuit of knowledge and improvement of professional skills, a willingness to take responsibility and accountability for professional decisions or actions, to be responsible for maintaining the effectiveness of one's own performance and to work within the limits of one's competence.

But there are other types of codes, for example with regard to treatment of moral subjects, as well as relationship with clients, colleagues, business partners or club owners, and even society at the broadest sense. These attitudes emphasise the relationship of health sport to the health of society as a whole (as part of or as an independent entity).

Whatever the type, a code of ethics helps to understand how to deal with problematic or ambiguous situations, to find solutions to moral dilemmas. This is important when it comes to choosing a single guiding principle according to which a dilemma will be resolved. *Codes* are a means of shaping and developing a culture of communication and ethical attitudes. They have a significant impact on the opportunities to build a positive image of oneself as a good professional and of one's workplace. Codes also serve as a deterrent to conflicts of interest.

Professional etiquette. *Professional etiquette* is another means of implementing professional ethics. *Professional etiquette* is a set of rituals that are developed informally to maintain the overall facade of the profession in front of the public (Gofmanis, 2001). Its main task is to show fair treatment. It is to show that the whole training process is going according to plan or according to routine. The client requires an individual approach or a unique attitude even in the case of group training. In cooperation with individual trainers, this will be a personalised service which will always take into account the client's age, gender, physical condition and other parameters.

Professional etiquette plays an important role in the process of building trust between the client and the trainer, as the impression of competence must be given first and foremost. The first impression of a person, as psychologists have found, is formed in the first 90 seconds of contact. We also think of someone who is outwardly attractive as better, smarter, and more interesting than someone who is outwardly unattractive. The so-called 'oreola effect' is at work, which is manifested in the fact that in the process of forming a first impression, the overall positive impression

leads to a reevaluation of the partner, the negative impression - to a devaluation of the stranger (Omarova, 2002). These errors can be avoided in further communication if the professional's behaviour and manner of communication create a positive impression and the first impression of competence develops into the belief that competence exists and is manifested in all the criteria of competence. That is, the fitness trainer has the knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as the ethical attitudes consistent with professional ethics.

The process of interaction will not automatically build trust if certain elements are not met. *The form of address should be agreed upon* with the client at the outset of the relationship. This is an important element for the self-esteem of any person. In languages where there are different forms of addressing people you do not know, especially if they are older than you are, and/or more respected, it is preferable to address them in the more formal manner until the regularity of training has been established over a period of time. And then, if the trainer himself is more comfortable with another form of address, the issue can be revisited again to find the most optimal option for both parties. Another element to be observed in the communication process is the way the information is presented. There are precise guidelines in the literature which can be reduced to the following findings:

- avoid complicated trainer jargon. Clients don't study it, clients don't understand it, it won't help them;
- information should be simple and clearly presented;
- when making critical remarks, use the sandwich method: first compliment them, then criticise, then compliment again;
- speak slowly when reviewing the terms of the contract with your client.

Building trust is a gradual and sometimes quite a lengthy process until the client finds "his trainer" – if you trust the trainer, he is the right trainer for you. A trainer is often chosen because the person needs psychological support, not so much practical support. They may need someone who will stand by, supervise, control, and motivate them. "One person needs a trainer to scold them, other needs someone to motivate, support and parrot them. Some people need a chum, while others need a role model, a psychologist, or a sensei. The main thing is to find the right one", says Ralfs Upmanis (Smilga, 2022).

Successful cooperation and even less successful communication will not happen if the trainer is unable to accept the personality traits of the other. Tolerance and respect are two closely related moral categories that work both ways: tolerance allows you to gradually arrive at respect, and vice versa. Joseph Raz describes this relationship in general terms, but it is fully applicable to the professional ethics of fitness trainers. To be able to work

with a group one has to practise patience and tolerance. Tolerance means suppressing or restraining the inclination or desire to harass or embarrass another person, to harm them or to express an unwanted reaction. Tolerance is therefore the restraint of an action or desire that would be unpleasant for the recipient of that action. Within certain limits, respect for personal autonomy makes bad or evil behaviour tolerable (Raz, 2001). But you do not need be tolerant of any ethical violation by your client. This is defined more concretely by the internal rules of the clubs. For example, the internal rules of the “Myfitness” club state that in case of violation of the rules or rude behaviour, the staff has the right to ask the visitor to leave the premises of the club, as well as to impose a fine of 50EUR and/or to block the membership card for a certain period or to unilaterally terminate the membership contract. In these cases, the subscription fee or single visit fee is not refunded. The club has the right to claim full compensation for the damages suffered (Myfitness, 2023). Similar wording for non-compliance can be found in almost every fitness club.

Materials and Methods

The research material is basic literature in ethics, especially ethical codes. Method: philosophical reflection based on the analysis of literature.

Results

There is practically no professional ethics literature for fitness trainers in Latvian. The only book that has been used as a teaching tool so far is “Fundamentals of Professional Ethics” written by Aino Kuzņecova in 2003. The book “Fitness Philosophy and Practice” by Raisa Tarnopolska (2008) focuses on practice, with only a few pages devoted to fitness philosophy.

A study of the codes available in the public domain in Latvia for health and fitness professionals shows that they are so few in number that it is impossible to carry out a comparative analysis.

It is much more common practice to include ethical requirements for trainers and clients in the internal rules of a club, which are only available on the club’s website.

Discussion

The question of the image of the fitness trainers, what they should have and what role they play in dealing with different clients is a controversial one. For example, the IDEA Code of Ethics for group fitness trainers emphasises the requirement to model behaviour that values physical ability, function, and health above appearance: “Demonstrate a healthy behaviour and attitude towards the body (including your own)”. Healthy behaviour is free from harmful habits and physically active, but is appearance

irrelevant, can appearance motivate, perhaps demotivate? Does this mean that a fat trainer can also fit the image of a specialist, and thus motivate fat clients to take up active exercise?

The article “97 Rules To Live By For Personal Trainers” mentioned above emphasises the role of personality rather than image, which can excite clients, motivate them to emulate or be more enthusiastic: “Personality matters, always let your personality shine through in your training”.

The Latvian Health and Fitness Association’s “Code of Ethics for Personal Trainers”, on the other hand, only briefly mentions that trainers should be well-groomed and dress appropriately. No additional requirements are given.

The basic psychology of communication should be taken into account, as should the importance of first impressions. The first impression of a partner is the regulator of the subsequent relationship and the communicative behaviour. The first impression is necessary to choose the optimal communication tactics for contacts with a given partner. And if the fitness trainer does not take care of the impression he leaves on others, with his posture, neatness, cleanliness, attentiveness to the interlocutor, the initial positive impression may fade away as if it were not there. But a pleasant impression does not automatically guarantee a successful future cooperation.

Conclusions

Normative questions regarding ethics should be included in the education of fitness trainers, thus equipping them with the necessary tools to make ethical decisions.

In the client-trainer relationship, both parties are obliged to commit themselves, so the shared responsibility between client and trainer prevails, but only if the client has been sufficiently informed and has given informed consent. In order to raise the level of professional ethics, it would be desirable for sports associations to be more active in the development and implementation of professional codes. There is dire need for a textbook on ‘Professional ethics for fitness trainers.

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