

Busy Baby Boomers Brainstorm!

By Michele The Trainer

When we think of baby boomers, we think of hipsters, we think of music from the 60s and 70s, but have we thought about how many boomers are current or potential clients or students in our fitness audience?

"A recent AARP study estimated that 70 percent of those 45 and older plan to continue working in their "retirement" years, and a Roper Starch Worldwide survey found that the number may be as high as 80 percent. Financial stability isn't the only reason; the Roper study notes that pure enjoyment of work (35 percent of those questioned) or just a desire to try something new (5 percent) will also keep people on the job."¹

Baby boomers, we are busy, busy, busy! Who are boomers? Boomers are the first of several generations that are working more; in locations where the cost of living is very high and may have more than one job. Boomers

own the term Encore Career, which is defined here in a study from JWT BOOM:

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"In one of the most significant social trends of the new century, Boomers are inventing a new phase of work called the "encore careers." Glenn Ruffenach, editor of The Wall Street Journal's Encore report, the paper's guide to retirement planning and

living, will interview Jim Emerman of Civic Ventures at this year's Summit about this new segment of paid work that allows Boomers to use their talent and experience to give back to their communities.

"Millions of Boomers are headed not for an endless vacation but for a new stage of work, driven both by the desire to remain productive and the need to make ends meet over longer life spans," says Emerman. "Boomers can capitalize on longer working lives to go beyond their own narrow needs, get down to some of their most significant work and leave the world a better place than they found it."²

We have to consider that some who thought they would retire soon are currently reevaluating retirement and continuing to work. At what point, then, will more aquatic classes of varying intensities be



offered during times that will accommodate the fact that our students and clients might work during the day? How will anyone ever manage the stresses of a hectic work week and planning retirement without some extra aquatic programs?

When you look at the schedules for the 18 different gyms you are a group exercise substitute at, do you realize that every single aqua class is scheduled while your clients or students are trapped at the office? If you work at a retirement community, where the audience is genuinely retired, then of course it makes sense to offer a full schedule during the day. However, today most metropolitan large commercial facilities seem to offer only few daytime aquatic offerings with nothing before 9am or after 5pm. Our aquatic customers/students voice frustration that they might not get good substitutes, and often it's because the available subs are trapped on land working their day job somewhere else during those timeslots!

It's up to us, the baby boomer generation, to raise the scheduling and training standards and the associated awareness. I often tell my students "this ain't your mama's aqua class—well, unless of course you are really here with your mom" (as is sometimes the case!) Point being, land programming did not stay in the 80's with the department store catalog look of legwarmers, shiny leotards and headbands (ahh, you know we loved it!) Most folks of today are not the stay-at-home parents of years past. Baby boomers often will want to work, even if they do not have to. Our scheduling should accommodate the needs of the baby boomer generation and the incumbent generation X, providing more classes before work, after work and more for the weekend warriors.

It's up to us to educate fitness management that aquatic programming has a very serious following. Keep in mind that the water may be the best place someone can safely workout (say due to past injuries from those high impact legwarmer days), therefore scheduling to meet the demands is important for financial success. The schedule of aquatic offerings for fitness at a large club thus becomes a membership revenue/purchasing decision. What facility does not want to increase revenue-producing capability?

It's also up to us to educate our boomer peers and let them know the intensity potential and benefits of water workouts. There is a lot of fanfare for land workouts such as running, treadmills, elliptical machines, cycle classes, boot camps, but we know that there is still a need for educating participants on the

benefits of aquatic fitness. Just because there is less impact and/or pain, does not mean there is less benefit!

Before and after work, aquatic fitness programming might need to be more challenging to accommodate the boomers. Those who work in an office sit, sit, and sit some more. Sedentary office boomers may be motivated to push themselves because they know that they are sitting all day to recover. Daytime class populations may not require the same intensity as your boomers will need or expect.

Please see Chapter 6 “The Physical Laws” of the AEA Aquatic Fitness Professional Manual to review the methods of increasing (or decreasing) intensity. This chapter is specific to the aquatic fitness environment and you can use these tools to program challenging workouts for your boomers!

Timing considerations for work schedules should be considered. A thirty minute difference might make a difference in availability and attendance; for example, what if someone gets off work at 6 and there are no 6:30 classes? What if they are carpooling and cannot make it to an earlier class? I work at one pool where the official giant corporate club schedule does not change, and may never change. However, all the local aquatic students know that the class starts 30 minutes later; the time change became “tribal knowledge”. The manager and students know about the time change and everyone is happy. Change can happen!

Let's continue to brainstorm! Perhaps it's better logistically if aqua is on the schedule after land programming, such as cycling, instead of before. Is your boomer aquatic fitness programming competing for pool/lane space and for a seasonal time slot, such as children's after summer school swim programs? After school and after work could easily be the same general time. Your after-work boomers will want to come straight to the pool, as the warm water is our happy hour! Boomers also like to go from class to class. Sometimes they may run or cycle outside or even seek hot yoga or Pilates at a different facility before their morning class. Do you want to end right at 8am or 9am, when most folks start their workday then? Remember your boomer students need time to dress, or to drive home to prepare for work, and since you are the aqua teacher we can assume that yours will be the last class in their morning warrior program.

A perfect example of baby boomer scheduling is the AEA weekend events. AEA will often have events with strong presenters on Sunday, which is a nice opportunity for everyone. Fitness is very busy on Saturdays and many of us work on Saturdays. It's often difficult to find a quality program for instructors on Sunday, unless it's the last day of a long conference. The last day of a conference is generally quieter because attendees are checking out, traveling, etc. Weekend and Sunday only programs are awesome! If we work a lot, we must fit in our quality motivation and education and it's fantastic that AEA helps us achieve those goals!

Check CALENDARS at the AEA Website for Upcoming Events in Your Area!
www.aeawave.com

Solutions? Please don't read this and then run right into your group exercise manager without first listening to your boomers and observing daytime attendance; if it isn't broken don't fix it! Paradigm shift, even with baby steps, requires consideration and thought. Listening to students is always preferred, rather than querying them. Asking them suggests that you can change things, when you might not be the decision maker. You know they will talk – so you can easily listen. ▀

References

¹AARP Magazine, The 15 Best Places to Reinvent Your Life; By Grace Lichtenstein, Elaine Robbins, and Michael Dupuis, May-June 2003

²Baby Boomer Statistics and Leading-Edge Research Reveal What Drives Boomer Mindset... JWT BOOM is the premier integrated marketing firm specializing in reaching consumers 40+, and a leading source of information about Baby Boomers and older consumers. Providing results-driven strategy and execution, JWT BOOM excels at helping clients build profitable and lasting relationships with Boomer and mature consumers. The group is headquartered in San Francisco.

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Michele the Trainer loves warm clean water from the puddle to the pool to the Pacific. She is an ACE Personal Trainer, AFAA Group Exercise Instructors, and PADI Divemaster, and of course an AEA certified aquatic instructor. Having transformed her own body from size 40 to size 4 (the good old tried and true diet and exercise way), Michele is obsessed with fitness, health, and wellness. With her oceanic connection and background, warm water fitness quickly became a passion! For more on Michele visit www.michelethetrainer.com or you can email Michele at michele@michelethetrainer.com