

Motivating Men – *Be Willing to Make a Change!* **By Jenni Lynn Patterson**

How do we get male participants in our pool? How do we keep them coming back? These are long-standing questions of the aquatic fitness industry.

The pool provides my personal training clients amazing results, not just for muscle tone and strength, but for cardiovascular endurance as well. Many of my female clients were happy to try the water and expand their modality of exercising, but the men were a whole other story. I know I shouldn't be so blunt, but it was like pulling teeth! However, once they got in, they loved aquatic training.

Soon I had several men regularly attending aquatic group exercise, and really cranking up the intensity of class. After a few months, I started to notice there were an equal number of men and women in class, sometimes the men would even outnumber the women! The intensity and aggressive movements of the men motivated the women in class; soon there was some healthy competition going on.



For example, one of my favorite things to do is measure the level of the water before and after a class to determine how much we pushed out of the pool. Participants find this to be a fun challenge during *Rock & Rolls*. (Using buoyant hand bars, *Rock & Roll* is a suspended exercise that transitions from a push up position (plank) to a supine position and back again, achieved by tucking and shooting the feet between arms.) The men and women compete to see who could push more water out.

Utilizing basic exercises that target large muscle groups kept the men coming back. There are a few exercises with hand bars – chest press, push up, jumping jack and *Rock & Roll* – that I must include for the men to feel that class has been a complete workout. Incorporating explosive, powerful moves keeps the intensity and holds the participants' interest throughout each training session. Consider borrowing moves from various martial arts to take training to a new level, especially with the use of equipment to complete the feel – and intensity – of this popular training modality.



With the increase in male participants I can say I've started to rethink the way I program my classes and workouts. Besides doing the large muscle groups and explosive moves, I love to incorporate HIIT (high intensity interval training) including Tabata formats, and a personal favorite – wall work! Push offs from the wall and running back with arms up overhead is a cardio challenge that inspires a competitive edge. Wall taps (tapping feet on the wall and then back to the pool bottom without the hands on the wall for support) provide an innovative core focus while keeping the heart rate elevated.

Another key element to success is vocal motivation. All participants, male and female, need to be pushed. Using motivating and enthusiastic words/phrases will always get more energy out of your class. You are more than just a class leader; you are a coach, a team captain and a cheerleader rolled into one.

More than anything I really try to keep everyone moving the entire time and pushing everyone to reach his/her personal physical limits. Of course we need to take breaks to hydrate and recovery from anaerobic intervals, but the more movement, the happier my students seem to be. It's a pleasure coming to class and seeing such a variety of participants gaining the most from the water workout, no matter their age, gender or size.

A favorite success story was getting my fiancé, Chris LaCour, into the pool! It took awhile, and lots of complaining, but he eventually jumped in...and now he has come to love water fitness so much that he became an aquatic instructor. The following helps to understand his perspective, and possibly that of many other male participants:

Q. What finally got you into water fitness?

A. "It took me three years and a serious spine injury to finally get me into the pool to exercise. Before then, I thought "aqua aerobic" training was for seniors and people needing physical rehabilitation. Little did I know what impact water fitness would have on my life."

Q. What benefits have you experienced because of doing water fitness?

A. "After a successful surgery, my loyal fiancé (girlfriend at the time) and water instructor, Jenni Lynn, urged me into the pool to regain the strength and muscle I had lost over the previous 9 months. Over the next five years of doing water fitness I lost body fat, gained muscle and improved my cardiovascular health tremendously. I can easily say it has been one of the best decisions I have ever made for my body and life."



Chris LeCour – powerful training in the pool. Photo by Nathan Rohrer.

Q. How has your perception of water fitness changed?

A. "I am now a huge advocate of water fitness to anyone willing to listen! Being lucky enough to have learned from Jenni Lynn's athletic style of pool training, and happily being her guinea pig, I decided to become an aquatic instructor and encourage other guys to get into the water! It takes time and persistence, but men are learning just how beneficial water fitness can be."

Elevating the overall energy of class, and motivating participants to challenge their level of training helps draw more and more students, including men, to my classes. There's always going to be resistance to change, especially from those students that have been in the pool for decades, but just like we learned at a very young age, "sharing is caring". So let's make an effort to change so everyone can jump in and share the benefits of water!

Jenni Lynn Patterson is NSCA- CPT, AEA-Certified and AFAA-Certified and has been teaching aquatics in New York City for almost 10 years. Jenni Lynn incorporates kickboxing, H.I.I.T., Yoga, Pilates, and strength training in the pool. She truly believes the perception of water fitness can be transformed and soon ALL ages and genders will be working out together in the pool! For more information, contact her at www.jennilynnfitness.com or swetnyc@gmail.com

