

# From Excuses to Enthusiasm: Boosting Senior Fitness Participation and Retention

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# Food for Thought

How can we build a relentless persistence for living a physically active lifestyle in a population that has been told they are old and tired, have done “life,” and now should just rest and enjoy the years they have left?

# Human Nature of Participation

- Why do we choose to participate?
- What factors go into a decisional balance to participate or not participate in health-related behaviors?
  - Health Belief Model
  - Social Cognitive Theory
  - Self-Efficacy Theory

# Barriers to Fitness Programming

Barriers you face as an organization, fitness program or fitness professional

- Equipment
- Space
- Funding
- Competing programs

# Barriers to Fitness Programming

Barriers your seniors are facing in starting or maintaining their participation:

- Time
- Health
- Environment
- Social support
- Self efficacy
- Generational stigmas
- Travel
  - Kilgour et al., 2024 – most common barriers physical health/fitness, lack of motivation/interest, fear of falls/history of falls, and environmental barriers.

Which of the above are real vs. perceived barriers?

# Does Self-Efficacy Matter to Participation?

- Studies tell us it is at least a contributing factor (Collado-Matteo et al., 2021; Colangelo and Weissbrod, 2019; Lewis et al., 2016; McAuley et al., 2011; Notthoff et al., 2017)
- Acute vs Chronic Self-Efficacy
  - Does acute self-efficacy lead to chronic-self efficacy?
- Exercise programming leading to self efficacy (Neupert et al., 2009; Toros et al., 2023)
- Self-efficacy, while important, only one factor.

# Social Influence

We are social beings...and the opportunity for social interaction may influence our behavior in exercise participation.

Influence of social interaction on exercise participation in older adults.

Does this generation have FOMO?



# Motivations for Exercise in Older Adults

Family and Friend  
Support

Positive Reported  
Outcomes

Social  
Interaction/Social  
Well-being

Personal Benefits

Outside Facilities

Fun Environment

Improved Health

Acquired  
Knowledge

Professional  
Support



# Overcoming Barriers and Leveraging Motivations to Create an Engagement Exercise Program

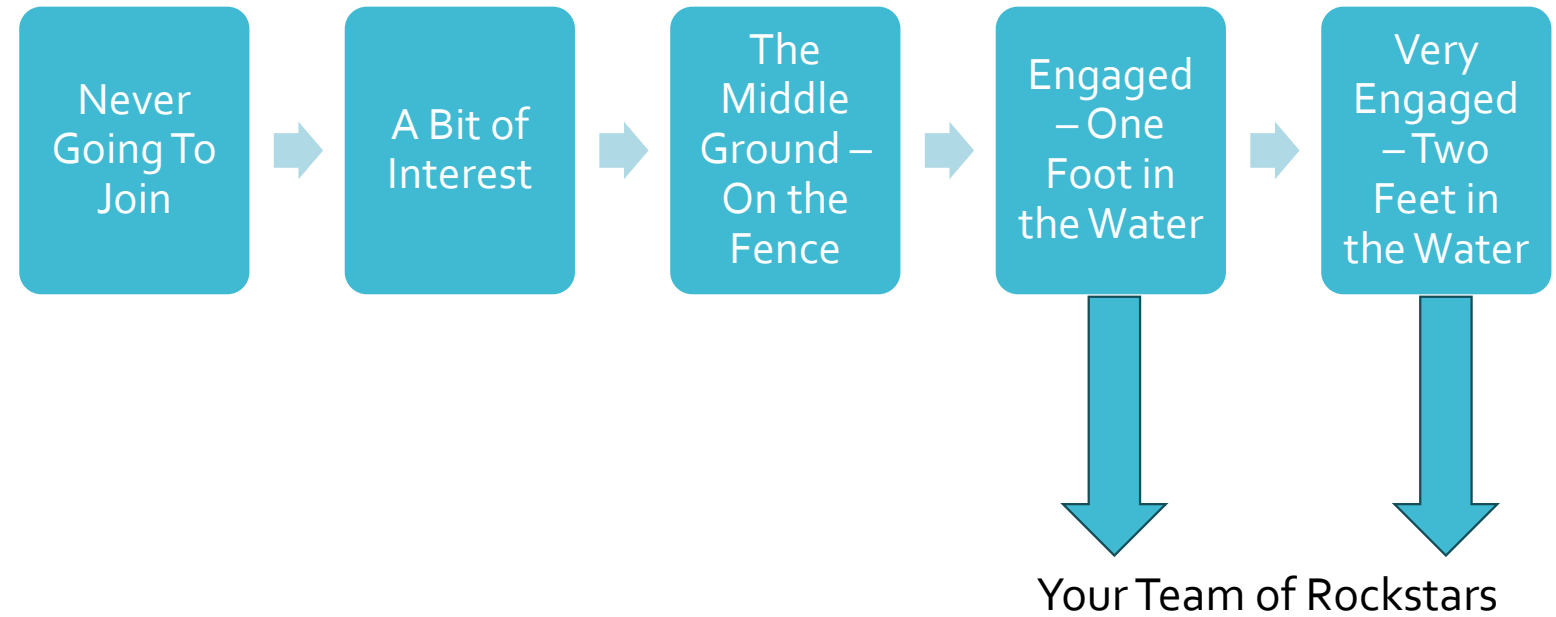
- Creating a fitness program that members not only want to participate in, but don't want to miss.
  - Create a FOMO program?
- Overcome barriers – or at least minimize barriers and maximize (leverage) motivations.
- Consider how each of the following either overcomes barriers, leverages motivations or both.

# Creating Engaging Fitness Programs for Older Adults

Consistently take the temperature of engagement



# Utilize Your Rockstars



1. For good or bad your members talk– use it to your advantage!
2. Ambassador Program for your fitness programming
  - Fitness Center or company swag?
  - Discounts on services?
  - Referral bonuses?

# Certified and Educated Fitness Professionals

Remember – safety and support two factors in whether someone participates.

- Educated, certified professionals staffing a fitness program
- Professionals that pursue continuing education and specialty certifications for the population.
- Class variety.
- Adequate space for classes.
- Does your program utilize nature?

# Equipment Selection: A Key Component

## Equipment that meets the needs of older adults

- Ease of use.
- Participants can work in multiple planes.
- Challenges fitness center members in various transferrable physiological mechanisms – strength, power, and endurance.
- Equipment that makes progress tracking easy.

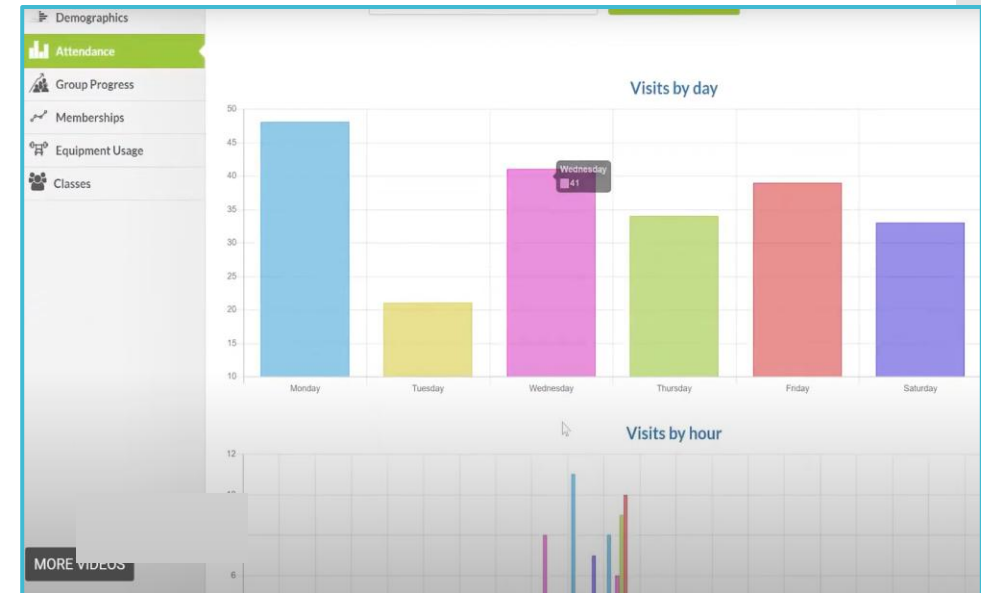
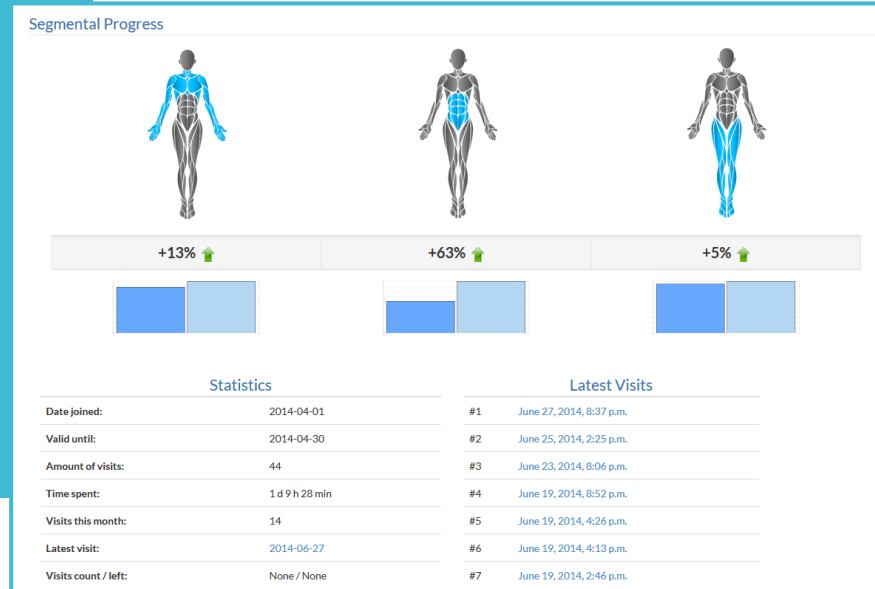


# Measure, Report, Measure, Report, Measure, Report...

If you aren't measuring, your program is wandering aimlessly

- Measure your participation (track everything)
  - Which classes are working, which might need an adjustment?
  - When is the equipment being used the most?
  - How many personal training sessions are being conducted each week or month?
  - How many rehabilitation referrals are occurring?
  - Track progress within the program.

*Examples of HUR Automatic Data Reporting:*



# Measure, Report, Measure, Report, Measure, Report...

If you aren't measuring, your program is wandering aimlessly

- Measure the physiological impact of your program
  - Physiological changes impact:
    - Independence
    - Quality of Life
    - Engagement/excitement about the program
    - Social activities
      - Holistic??? – the impact far beyond how much power someone can produce or repetitions they can complete.



# Encourage Consistency

When thinking about goals, there is an interplay between several variables associated with a fitness program.

- **Consistency** in participation may be the one that has the greatest influence.
- Progress means different things – but generally leans into consistency.
- There is a physiological impact of consistency and detraining.
  - Does this physiological impact transfer to psychological variables such as motivation and self-efficacy?

At least partly comes back to measuring and reporting.



# Push Your Members and Show Your Passion for the Industry

- Work hard, have fun, repeat!
- Your older adults are capable of so much more than many of them think and we often think as staff members.
  - Are we pushing older adults hard enough during exercise to see physiological change?
- The idea of minimal effective dose in exercise programming.

# Conclusions

- Why it matters? – the impact of living a physically active lifestyle in older adults.
- Creating an engaging program is often a series of small steps or small changes.
- Consistency matters.
- Questions?

Thank You!



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