



Margo J. Lori, FitnessFirst For You, LLC

FitnessFirst For You, LLC is a mobile fitness business that goes directly to our clients home, office or gym and sets them up on a fitness program that meets their health and fitness goals. FitnessFirst became a reality in June of 2002 and has been growing ever since! Below is my "story":

My life took the normal route, graduated from high school with no question of what was expected of me next—college. Graduating from college in 1981 with a 4 year degree in Business and Administration I was ready to face the world! But by my late twenties, I was beginning to question my professional choices—did I really want to spend the rest of my life from "9—5", 50 out of 52 weeks a year in an office working for the agenda of someone else? By my mid thirties the answer was very clear—NO! I left my promising sales career, moved to another part of the country and joked with my friends that "I had re-tired"! Even though I had "retired" I still needed to make a living so I returned to my college career of waitressing and absolutely loved every minute of it. I was making great money, having way too much fun and wasn't until I turned 40 that reality set in . . . Did I really see myself as a waitress when I was 60? Or was it possible to begin anew? And what exactly were my choices living in Leelanau County?

The most significant factor that led me to the development of FitnessFirst was I had decided at this pivotal point in my life to review what my passion in life was . . . What did I really enjoy doing and could I make a living at it? Exercise had become a huge part of my life as it was necessary to counteract the effects of my "server" lifestyle. Not only was I lifting weights and running but also participating in 5 and 10k races and completed my first triathlon!

So began the research on personal training and different certifying agencies. I chose wisely on becoming certified thru the American Council on Exercise (ACE) as this is a nationally recognized certification and requires in depth study in order to pass their personal fitness trainer exam. Excited by the process of learning again and an exam date only a few months away; I "hit the books."

While studying, I also began outlining what I really wanted to do with this certification. While working at a fitness center offered certain benefits, I was quick to realize this wasn't for me. I need to be independent with my thoughts and business decisions. I knew with talking with women of my age group there was a lot of frustration with fitness and weight loss and their common question was "How do you do it?" and "How do you stay fit?". My inspiration came from these women who were just like me, struggling with weight gain and finally realizing all the diets in the world, all the supplements only work for the short term. What works is a lifestyle of daily exercise and healthy eating habits. My business was "born" and my initial target market established!

My first client hired me in June of 2002 and I haven't looked back! I continued to work full time at the restaurant in order to "pay the bills" but this left the day free to continue to build my client base. I had seen a lot of business owners go into a lot of debt to establish their business, only to fail and this was not my plan. I vowed to build this business debt free and I still keep with this business practice today! As my business grew, I cut back the hours on my other job and finally "cut the cord" in 2006 (very scary!). FitnessFirst has grown from 30 client sessions in 2002 and with the addition of 2 part time trainers, to over 1300 sessions in 2008!

My biggest preparation for business ownership has to be the definition of my target market and understanding their needs. I also continue to grow in knowledge almost daily from additional certifications, to constant self-education in the field of health and fitness. My clients can also readily identify with me, as I am a reflection of them; middle aged with a non-stop battle with food and proper exercise!

My biggest enjoyment is I am actually making a difference . . . I think we all struggle with "the meaning with our life" and if what we do really matters. I can now honestly say that I am making a difference in many, many lives and that has made the biggest difference in my life. I have purpose, motivation and a genuine desire to help others. What surprises me most is that I get paid for this! (Don't tell anyone, but I would do this for free!)

To help others see, not only a difference in their weight, but drops in cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar - all by simple exercise—is amazing. They actually gain back control over their body and along with that comes huge gains of energy and confidence. This is not only by biggest enjoyment—but also is what keeps me motivated with this business.

What surprises me the most is the amount of hours that is required for a successful business. This has to come from choice and not from necessity. It is my choice to get up at 4:00 am every morning and also work on the weekends; it is my choice not to turn down new clients and to make room for them in the schedule, etc. I really think this has been key in the success of FitnessFirst—I want to do this! My advice for future women business owners would be:

- Define your personal strengths, weaknesses and your passion. Can you turn your passion into a need for someone else? Who would that person be and what defines them?
- Once you define your target market, how are you going to reach them? My biggest struggle has been and still is advertising. To this day, I still struggle with finding a cost effective way to advertise my business. Traditional sources (newspaper, TV, radio) are still to pricey for my budget. Direct mail and of course word of mouth seem to work best!
- Listen to your gut instinct. This has saved me time and time again from excessive spending and unnecessary investments. No one should know your business like yourself . . . You don't need a "coach" to tell you what you should already know . . . You are the expert and if you aren't, then it isn't time yet for your business venture!
- Listen to your clients and help them define what they are looking to achieve by utilizing your service. In turn, you will know what direction to head in to properly assist them! Repeat customers are ideal—they are the ones that tell your story!
- Set annual business goals and break this down into measureable monthly goals. This will help you see what is working and also be able to correct what is not!
- Believe, believe and believe. When that isn't enough—then pray, pray and pray!!

Well, that is my story! Hopefully by next year a new chapter will unfold as it is my intention to expand into different markets!!!