



BY JACK I. TOMPKINS
CHAIRMAN, CEO,
FIT ATHLETIC CLUB
HOUSTON, TEXAS

A FITNESS CLUB SHOULD BE MORE THAN A SWEAT BOX.

This belief guided the planning of Fit Athletic Club in downtown Houston, and this philosophy continues to inspire its direction today. Thousands of professional men and women have voted with their time and wallets to let us know they agree.

Unlike “big box” gyms, our athletic club does not compete on price, but rather on service, the quality of our facility (which includes having the cleanest dressing rooms in the industry), the caliber of people we hire and train, and ambience. We decided these attributes meet an unfulfilled need in the marketplace.

This philosophy is working. Fit Athletic Club just celebrated its 10th anniversary and is financially successful. Most importantly, Fit has helped thousands

of people improve their health, and it is exciting to be in such a business. Members can work out in a social setting with personal trainers and like-minded people around to keep them motivated. Additionally, we have been able to provide dozens of jobs for the Houston area.

ONE OF FIT'S GOALS IS TO MAKE A MEMBER'S WORKOUT THE BEST HOUR OF THEIR DAY. WE WANT PEOPLE TO LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING OUT, NOT DREAD IT.

We want people to look forward to working out, not dread it. We also want a strong sense of community, not just a “big box” where people run inside and sweat. So we built a café, complete with juice and smoothie bar, where people

can gather before and after their workout, meet their business contacts, eat healthy food and watch sporting events on a big screen television. The spectacular view of the downtown Houston skyline serves to enhance the gym's atmosphere.

Business owners know that a well-run organization happens because of the people who manage the business. This is not magic, but an executive who finds the right people to do the right thing at the right time will discover that management is so easy, he feels as if he's not working. Our club is managed by those kinds of top-notch professionals. This greatly lessens the amount of time I have to devote to the business, which allows me to pursue my other business and non-profit activities.



My professional life started in the public accounting and corporate world and brought me into the entrepreneurial world via a most interesting path, but I have learned that several basic principles serve a person well in any type of organization, as long as a person remembers to stay true to himself and what he believes.

HERE ARE THE CORE TENETS OF THAT PHILOSOPHY:

THE RIGHT PEOPLE. Recruit, hire and train the right people to do the right thing, and the business succeeds with a lot less effort than would be expected.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP LIGHTS THE WAY. This principle is about modeling the behavior you want to see. Employees will do what they see the boss do. If you want a particular behavior, show that trait to the employees, and they will show it to clients. This includes politeness, respect and forgiveness. Simply put, lead by example.

PERSISTENCE WINS THE RACE. The words “be persistent” roll out easily, but actually pursuing a challenge while facing obstacles can be difficult. However, persistence can be a competitive advantage. When times are difficult, push forward into the fray. Figure out how to go over, around or through the roadblock. In doing so, you develop perseverance for the next challenge to come.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK. Did an employee bring you a problem? Listen to what that employee and other workers say about it. Chances are one of your employees has the solution. Offer employees the opportunity to be heard. If you spend all your time talking, you will miss out on the answers around you.

ESTABLISH AN ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM. Goals and objectives are important for the company as a whole and for each employee. Team members are happier if they know they are being held accountable. Accountability allows employees to grade themselves, and it lets them know whether they won or lost when they go home at the end of each day.

NEVER STOP LEARNING. Early in my life I developed a passion for learning new things every day. The skill sets we have now will be obsolete in five years. If we continue doing business without making necessary changes, we too will become obsolete. All of us should keep on learning. For me, that included becoming involved in entrepreneurial ventures. Making changes has been a blessing for me because change allows me to grow.

MENTOR OTHER PEOPLE. Certain men did that for me and made a huge difference in my life. Anyone blessed with wisdom, talent or insight and has been knocked around a little has an obligation to advise others. That covers almost everyone.

WATCH THE CASH. Business has many variables, but if you have a firm grasp on cash flow, you will know whether your business is healthy and if the business is performing as it should. Monitoring cash flow tells you whether you are hitting your most important goals. Look at what's in the bank and what was in the forecast. If you see negative variances, immediately investigate to determine what is keeping you from achieving your targets.

STUDY THE COMPETITION. Find out what your competitors are doing, but do not automatically assume the competition knows what it is doing. Your model may be superior. Adopt best practices.

PRACTICE FORGIVENESS IN YOUR PERSONAL AND BUSINESS LIFE. Grudges and bitterness block our ability to achieve our personal best. Letting go of anger by forgiving others allows us to see a brand new world. Doctors say practicing forgiveness lowers blood pressure and lengthens lives. Christ said forgiving others is necessary in order for us to be forgiven.

AVOID ANGER. Whoever loses his temper first, loses. Anger wastes time and creates dysfunction. Laugh often, and don't take yourself too seriously.



Finally, passions aside from work are essential to a well-rounded life. A well-rounded life allows us to achieve our personal best spiritually, mentally, physically and socially. One of my passions is pursuing the Christian lifestyle. I'm also passionate about my relationship with my wife and family, extended family and friends. Baylor is another passion of mine. Another is Star of Hope, a mission organization that provides the homeless with the Gospel, food, clothing and shelter. The Bible tells us to take care of the needy. Attacking a problem such as homelessness on my own would be insurmountable, but uniting with like-minded believers has allowed me to assist others in a way I never dreamed possible. Through my faith in Christ's teachings, I have discovered that a true core passion of mine is helping those in need.

I believe that having numerous passions is important because they add meaning to what we do each day. They allow us to pursue something bigger than ourselves.

LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVE

