

Flooding social media are before and after pictures of the latest weight loss trend – a shake, a workout program, an app. But what you might not see a lot of is fat personal trainers. I was one of them and this is my story.

My first wakeup call. I was always an athlete in younger years but the stress of college took its toll on my body like many young adults, along with various injuries which took me out of sports completely. In college, I was the heaviest, largest student amongst my exercise science peers. I remember the anxiety around the body composition chapter of my exercise testing and prescription lab. Donning a sport bra and shorts, I became even more aware when my skin was pinched and measured, when I was dunked underwater in a cage, and finally, when I used the handheld body fat analyzer. My female lab partners exclaimed when their numbers read 18%, 20%, 22% - I was at 33%. Obese at a size 10. Who would want to hire a trainer that looked just like them or that was unhealthy themselves?

As I moved into my first position as a wellness coach, I was able to do what most women do – hid my insecurities behind a shirt that was two sizes too big. The gym environment I worked out was more inclusive to all abilities than other boxed gyms in the area which helped make me more comfortable. I was able to study and pass my personal training exam with flying colors. Yet, I still struggled to get clients as the other trainers flaunted their physiques. I started focusing on talking to general members about moving better, showed my skillset with my coaching words instead of showing off crazy exercises only the elitist could do, and I found my way to some amazing clients who helped me get healthier while helping them learn about their body. I was on a roll after three hard years with barely any time in my schedule to rest, a size 6 physique with 24% body fat, and a newfound appreciation for moving better.

A job opportunity opened up for my fiancée that lead us to moving several hours away from this gym. The rural area had only one chain gym with no interest in adding another personal trainer to their team. I settled on a job within a law firm because it was steady and a nice break from the crazy schedule I would have as a trainer. Three years of hating my job daily, eating my feelings for lunch, drinking the day away as soon as 5:00pm hit lead me to the heaviest and unhappiest person I ever was – size 14, 38% body fat. I needed a change and my parents were willing to help me by giving us a place to live within their new home states away. An opportunity to restart and refresh.

We took the leap and I applied to every fitness facility within the nearby city. Every interview made me more aware of the missing gap in trainer – client relations. I was able to land a job with a high intensity interval training franchise with the understanding that I, too, would be an example of the company's program and its effectiveness. My first classes were rumored amongst the members as the new trainer was a chubby girl. Over the next few weeks, our free trials were filling up with more and more people wanting to connect with someone who was going through the same struggles and journey as them. I had countless conversations about how my clients were more inspired because they were watching me transform along with them. Within eight months, I was able to boost our membership and lose 50 pounds, dropping down from a size 14 to a size 4, my body fat from 38% to 22%. I was able to help many others achieve the same results by struggling through the 30 minutes of torture along with them several times a day.

By going through my personal journey of health and wellness, from fat to fit, I found that I was able to empathize with my clients more and encourage them more by showing them it can be done. My success became their success. Many personal trainers may not have ever had the feeling of dread as they

stepped on a scale, or getting a larger sized clothing item to help hide the fat. I have and I am grateful I did.