

## **Richard Marfell**



### **Personal Trainer**

#### **Name**

Richard Marfell

#### **Job title**

Wellness coach/Personal Trainer (Home training)

#### **Qualifications**

Premier Diploma in Personal Training

#### **Introduction**

Richard is a personal trainer who retrained after a first career in Design. He trains people in environments outside of the gym, such as in their houses or in parks and open spaces. He also offers sports massage and nutritional advice to his clients.

#### **What does your job involve?**

I train people in their own homes and also offer sports massage, nutrition advice and listening therapy. I work with my clients in a variety of environments, although most of the time it is in their homes, in their private gyms, and sometimes in the summer we train outside. I bring the training equipment in my car and this includes dumbbells, kettlebells, cables, a step, stability balls and an exercise mat.

Each training session lasts one hour, and I schedule thirty minutes between sessions for travel and setting up time. My main role is to instruct exercises and design exercise programmes. I used to do some fitness testing as well but now I do very little. The only thing I do is weigh people and take their body fat if they want me to. I usually get weight loss clients to measure their progress by seeing how many holes on their belt they have dropped.

### **How did you get into your current job?**

At school, I did A-levels before doing a BA in Design at Bristol University. I went into full time employment in the exhibition industry and worked in it until I was 38. At that point, I realised the design industry was rapidly changing as people were coming in with less design knowledge than me but better IT skills. Either I needed to develop my IT skills or change career.

I went to a careers advisor who did a personality test with me. The test showed that my current job did not suit my personality very well. However, to retrain could take me three or four years and my family commitments meant that I couldn't afford this time. I had to look at shorter courses and we came up with two ideas - one was personal training and the other one was landscape design.

I went to see the landscape design training company but there was no one there to see me. So, I went to Premier training, who are a company offering personal training courses, and there I met with the careers adviser and course instructor. After a conversation with them I realised a career in personal training was a possibility for me. It was a Wednesday and there was a three-month course starting on the next Monday so I thought 'well, I'll just do it'.

Initially, I was very nervous as I was nearly 40 and I thought everyone else was going to be about 18. I tackled this by getting to the course early, meeting the trainers and the other students. As I was there first it felt like it was my environment that people were coming into so that made me comfortable. The course cost a significant amount of money so I sat at the front where there were no distractions as I wanted to be absorbed in it.

### **How did your career progress after your training?**

Once I had qualified I kept some of my previous work and went to work in a gym as a personal trainer. I quickly realised that the training course was just a start as I actually knew nothing about working as a personal trainer. There is a lot of learning to do about how to handle situations and working in a new environment. The gym environment was ideal as I was supported and I learnt to adapt to it. I slowly did more and more personal training and less design work before going out on my own and doing home training.

### **What would be a typical day or week for you?**

I have between 40-50 people on my client base and I can't train all of them all the time. I can do up to six clients a day and the most I have had on one day is eight clients. The problem with having eight clients is that it equates to 12-13 hours of work when you include travel in between. I can train three clients back to back before having a break so I may do three clients in the morning and then three in the late afternoon/evening. Often, I won't get home until 9-9.30 pm. I say I don't work at the weekends, but I will do an occasional session if I can't keep a client happy during the week. So, I do around 30 training sessions a week. You need to be careful not to do seven days a week or you will quickly burn out. You also need to learn to say 'no' if necessary.

I also spend a lot of time sorting out my online diary. One thing I learnt quickly was that you need to be flexible. For example, yesterday was a good example of how things can change quickly as the day before I had six clients scheduled in my diary with the first one at 8 am. I allow half an hour between

clients to get from A to B and a break in the middle for lunch. However, by the evening before I was down to three clients as one client had hurt their ankle, one had an appointment more important than training and one had flu. However, this meant I could offer training sessions to clients that I had previously told that I had a full diary.

### **What are the pros and cons of working in home training?**

When you train people in a gym the onus is on them to make the effort to get there and they can cancel without even talking to you. However, when you visit people in their homes training is much easier for them as they don't have to leave their house and all they have to do is get changed.

One issue with home training is that you don't have such a wide choice of equipment as you are limited by what you can get into your car. There is time wasted getting to the client's house and getting training equipment out of the car and set up. Once you have done the hour you have 30 minutes to get to the next client but 10 or 15 minutes can be eaten up by loading the car, making the next appointment and having a chat. So, you are not just doing an hour, you are doing an hour plus 15 minutes for a chat and about 10 minutes for setting up. Add in the time it takes to get there and it is closer to two hours, but you only get paid for the time you train them. Whereas in a gym you can train clients back to back without travel time and time spent moving equipment. The bonus with home training you get to keep 100% of the money and don't have to give a proportion to the gym or pay them rent.

Travel can be a little stressful, particularly if you get behind time and if you get stressed you may not be in the right frame of mind to train clients. Travel must be really tough in busy places like London.

There can be distractions, for example, I sometimes get children joining in if they are at home. While this can be a distraction it can make sessions fun. I have clients I train outside in a small group of five clients all of whom are mums. I have had a situation where I was training five mums and their five children. Also, cats and dogs often get involved as well and while it is challenging it is nice that everyone gets some exercise.

Group sessions can be a social catch up for the group as well as a training session. You must not be too sensitive or precious and allow them time to chat and joke with each other. Quite often when they come to pay they will give me a bit more for the hard work I've done.

### **What are the personal skills that are needed to be a successful trainer?**

Success is all about personality and the skills needed vary depending on your training environment, client base and your location. Above all you need to be able to empathise, listen and interact with people. You need to be able to talk to people about things like politics, sport, cats, dogs, anything. I have learnt a lot from the people I train and hopefully they have learnt a lot from me. You then build up a relationship and you can exchange things. For example, I have had people help me with business ideas, mortgages and health issues. You also get acts of kindness with people giving you vegetables from their garden or free tickets for sporting events.

You need to be very adaptable and flexible. I make sure that I tailor exercise to the client's needs on the day. In the early days of my personal training career I would prepare programmes before visiting my clients, then go along with a variety of equipment and instruct the session. Now I have a conversation with the client as we warm up so I can gauge how the client feels and whether they have any injuries or other problems. Then I'll adjust training to suit them.

Training has got to be about what the client wants, not what I want. I have tried pushing people to do more than they want to do but it ends up being a less enjoyable session for them. They need to get some enjoyment from the session or it ends up being something they won't look forward to or continue.

Listening to your client, observing them and getting a feeling for how they are reacting are the most important things.

**It seems that developing the relationship is important.**

I think so as I have seen trainers who can be very robotic in their approach. They don't adapt to their clients' needs and are not flexible. I've seen people training where no one says anything, apart from the trainer saying 'give me another five reps'. Unless they are very good trainers and get great results that relationship is not going to last very long. Equally if you are training and you don't get on with your client you must ask yourself whether it is beneficial to continue that relationship. You may think they will get on better with someone else and you've got to do what's right for your client.

**What advice would you have for people who want to follow a similar career path to yours?**

You should talk to people in the industry who are working in gyms or doing personal training and find out about the reality of working in the fitness industry. It's good to have a niche to fit into, such as training sports people or people with specific medical conditions; so talk to trainers who are doing different things. There are a lot of trainers out there so find what you enjoy and don't worry about what other trainers are doing. People will be attracted to you because of your personality and what you offer.

Also think about appearance as that goes with being professional. It is important to look good and have appropriate clothing. I have my logo on my training gear and some people put branding stickers on their cars but I don't. You also need to look after your fitness equipment and keep it clean. It shows that you care and how can you look after other people if you can't look after yourself. Also, be honest with your clients and be 'human'. For example, saying that you eat junk food occasionally allows them to relate to you better. Being completely obsessed with your own body and having perfect nutritional habits can provide an unobtainable standard for your clients to live up to.

This is an abridged version of an interview in *Careers in Sports Science*.