

How to Create a More Inclusive Fitness Business

 mindbody



As a fitness business,

you have the responsibility to create a safe and welcoming space for all. That means being as inclusive as possible regardless of experience, ability, and personal identity.

This guide offers ways to do just that—to broaden your services, connect with a variety of customers, and provide a better experience for those with unique needs.

Understand and expand your audience

As a seasoned business owner, you already know who is walking through your door each week. And while it's important to understand and maintain a strong connection with existing customers, you should continue to look for opportunities to build an increasingly diverse fitness community.

This means expanding your brand and service offerings to make an even bigger impact.

The following pages include a variety of ways your business can broaden your horizons—a win for you, your clients, and the broader community.



Welcome everyone





TO DO:

Creating a safe space that welcomes all, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or anything else, should be an important element of your business's culture.

Representation matters. Having a diverse team isn't only good for creativity, productivity, and retention, it's also good for your bottom line. Studies show that diverse teams lead to more profitable businesses. Make your recruiting process transparent and continue to reinforce the countless benefits of a diverse workplace to your staff.

Pay your staff equitably. Work that requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility should be paid the same, regardless of identity, race, or physical ability. On a regular basis, evaluate your current payroll (or even better, hire a third party to analyze your wages) and close any gaps that exist.

Invest in education for your team. Whether it be bias training, diversity and inclusion training, or a combination of both, continue to provide education and encourage thoughtful conversations about embracing differences.

Be conscious of and prevent microaggressions. Microaggressions are indirect and often unintentional expressions rooted in biases against marginalized groups. For example, an assumption based on race, use of gender-centric language, or a comment made related to age, ability, or sexuality. It's your responsibility to educate yourself and your team on microaggressions and prevent them from happening in the first place. Have an outlined policy and process to address these situations when they arise among your clients or team. While microaggressions may be overlooked or feel harmless, it's their pervasive nature built over time that causes harm to individuals, groups, and businesses.

CONTINUED:

Showcase diversity in your marketing. Much like the makeup of your team, your marketing speaks volumes about your business. Be authentic in your representation and showcase the unique differences that make up your community, team, and customer base. Remember: Diversity isn't just specific to race, gender identity, or age, it also relates to physical ability and body type, too.

Add donation-based classes to your schedule to raise money for causes you, your team, and your clients care about. With so many organizations working for equality, it's not hard to find one doing powerful work in your community—and beyond.

Host mixers or community classes for minority communities that adhere to local safety protocols and are socially distanced. These events create a sense of solidarity and unity, while also educating the majority about the minority experience. Community classes might also serve as a welcoming introduction to those who aren't ready to come to your facility quite yet.



Encourage cultural differences



Providing an inclusive environment for all cultures by encouraging differences in language, dress, and religion will create a better experience at your fitness studio or gym.



START HERE:

Outline and share your values. Welcome individuals of all cultures and backgrounds into your space and promote your dedication to inclusion through your core values—the foundation of your business. Share your values on your website, in your facility, and, of course, hire and train to them.

Hire bilingual or multilingual instructors. Especially if there's a large population of non-English speakers in your local community, consider hiring instructors who can teach class offerings throughout the week in different languages to meet their needs.

Have class materials in languages other than English. If you provide clients with any handouts or informational materials for classes, make sure to have copies on hand in other languages. Think about the pages of your website, as well.

Think about the music you play during class or in other areas of your facility. Adding tracks in other languages to your playlist can go a long way to make all cultures feel welcome.

Support the LGBTQIA+
community



Making a few thoughtful changes to support services for LGBTQIA+ customers will make your gym or studio's atmosphere more inviting.



“**Do. Your. Homework.** Don't be insulting and just slap on a rainbow flag on your website. Reach out to members or staff who are queer and ask for their input. Reach out to organizations that support the LGBTQ community for help, insight, and assistance.”

NATHALIE HUERTA, [THE QUEER GYM](#)

HERE'S HOW:

Make locker rooms and restrooms gender neutral. More businesses in every industry are making gender-neutral options available for customers, and it's an important addition for your facility as well. Whether it be a stall or a curtain, you'll want to be sure to have partitions in these facilities to provide privacy when desired.

Rethink your playlists. Have you taken the time to listen to the lyrics to some of the music you normally play in your gym or studio? It may surprise you (or maybe not) that some of the most popular pump-up jams will skew gender-specific, be overtly sexual in nature, and/or lean toward heteronormative tendencies. Be cognizant of these song selections, do your research, and ask your members for their ideas, too.

Invest in team training. Have conversations with your instructors and encourage them to provide class direction that isn't explicitly gender focused. Elements like using inclusive language (“we,” “us,” etc.) can make a big difference for your LGBTQIA+ clients.

Host mixers for LGBTQIA+ community members within the local fitness industry. This helps create an atmosphere of solidarity between community members. Plus, it serves the general community through education and exposure to LGBTQIA+ culture.

Empower individuals who have a disability



Ensure those with different needs can access your facility and join in on class activities.

GRITBOX

“We have about 75 fighters in our [Rock Steady] program, all with Parkinson’s. They range anywhere from 45 to 75 years old. All of our members are aware that, by being a member of our gym, they’re helping to support a program like this as well. So that’s really helped kind of create an amazing community around everything that we do there.”

CODY COOPER, GRIT BOX FITNESS

FOR EXAMPLE:

Have assistive equipment on hand, like straps or various weights so those with physical limitations can participate and follow along during class.

Consider sensory needs. Certain music, noise levels, or lighting could impact a customer’s experience in your space. Depending on your facility, offer specific times and/or class offerings without loud music and/or dim or flashing lights.

Get certified in corrective movement or work with an organization that specializes in fitness for specific conditions and limitations.

Have an extra instructor to assist those with limitations through modified exercises or to help perfect their form.

Create exercise programs for individuals being treated, recovering, or living with chronic ailments. Offer your services at a local treatment center and/or look into relevant certifications (for example, Cancer Exercise Specialist Certifications).

Be conscious of those impacted by trauma



Trauma can come from a single dangerous event, such as an accident, or a series of events such as exposure to violence or abuse. Incorporating trauma consciousness in your offerings is important to help those looking for a safe space to move.



HERE'S HOW:

Educate yourself and your team. Seek resources to understand possible triggers and how to minimize them in class.

Empower clients with options. Think of alternative ways students can choose to 'show up' in class. Let clients know it's perfectly fine to keep their eyes open, to opt out of hands-on cueing/modifications at any time, etc. To take it one step further, offer specific classes where noise levels are low and lighting is soft.

Recognize your limits. If a client approaches you/your team and needs support for trauma, support their need to seek guidance from a trained professional in this area. Consider offering yourself as an accountability partner and follow up with how their search for a counselor or sessions are going.

[For more on making classes, specifically yoga classes, more trauma-sensitive, read this blog post.](#)

Serve military and veterans





Giving back to members of the military and veterans shows your support for their service.

TO DO SO:

Offer military discounts.

Many fitness studios and gyms offer both active military and veteran discounts. It's a simple gesture of support and gratitude that goes a long way.

Give back with donation-based classes.

Organizations like [Catch a Lift](#) and [FitOps Foundation](#) use fitness to help vets heal and reacclimate to civilian life.

Connect with older adults



Providing a welcoming class environment for older demographics ensures continued movement for all.



“Mobility training like balance, flexibility—Working on all of those things is important because it helps you age well. Some people think when they get arthritis, they just need to sit in a chair. And they can’t or shouldn’t do anything because that’s what they’ve heard, and that’s the exact opposite of what they should be doing.”

PENNY BERGSTROM, POUND 4 POUND

HERE'S HOW:

Provide discounts for those 65 and up. Even those who aren't on a fixed income will be happy to save on their membership, classes, or other fees.

Create modified programs to enable older clients to take part in class activities; this may include shorter or low-intensity classes.

Offer dedicated hours for seniors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, those 65 and up are especially vulnerable. Your older clientele will be grateful for the precautionary measures you take as well as a safe space to move.

Establish a walking group. Walking is a popular form of exercise that's accessible for older clients. Offering a walking group can help to create community and accountability, too.

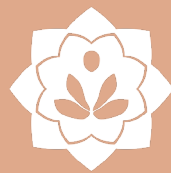
Partner with Silver Sneakers. This group is America's top fitness program targeting older adults and is 13 million members strong. There's ample opportunity for your business with this partnership.

Consider the needs of families



If you're a parent, you understand how difficult it can be to balance work and personal time with the needs of a child. Creating offerings that take these considerations into account can help you better serve parents and soon-to-be parents.

FOR EXAMPLE:



Hapa Yoga

“When I had the baby, I suffered from postpartum depression...I just couldn't find a place to go that I could, you know, either take the baby with me or accommodate childcare. And so once I started to feel better, I wrote my business plan and opened a studio within nine months.”

TINA KNIGHT, HAPA YOGA & FITNESS

Provide pre- and postnatal classes.

This is a great way to support clients who are pregnant or have recently given birth.

Schedule “Parent and Me” classes for customers to connect with their children during classes.

Add in express classes. These shorter classes are beneficial for parents on a tight schedule. They'll be thankful for abbreviated versions of classes that allow them to achieve their goals.

Offer virtual classes. Those parents who aren't able to leave the home will love the option to work out at home. [Learn more about how you can do so all within Mindbody.](#)

Help beginners get started



Starting a fitness journey can feel uncomfortable. Help beginners with motivating offerings and access to movement education.

dragonfly
HOT YOGA
YOGA | BARRE | FITNESS

“We’ll do a Yoga 101 and a Yoga 102, and we encourage both seasoned yogis and new yogis to come to the workshop. It’s two hours; it’s with one of our very seasoned instructors, and they just go over all the basics of yoga.”

NICOLE KING, DRAGONFLY HOT YOGA

Create a walking group. These aren’t just for seniors—walking groups are also a great way to bring individuals together and help them motivate each other. And, as walking is a low-impact exercise, it’s a great way to start moving, especially in the beginning.

Host virtual or in-person workshops to educate beginners on the types of classes your business offers. Sometimes, all it takes is a little information to help clients feel better about trying a new class.

Offer instructive on-demand videos that break down the basics of your workouts. You can make this available within Mindbody, too.

Consider creating modified classes just for beginners. Or, alternatively, have a second instructor on hand during regular classes to help beginners with questions, form, etc.

Develop offerings for students





Particularly if your business is located near a college, university, vocational/trade school, or other institution of higher learning, provide options for students.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

Provide student discounts. Enable students to bring in their school IDs for a reduced rate on memberships and/or classes.

Partner with local schools. Working with local institutions can open doors for all kinds of opportunities, including to promote your classes and business on-campus or to offer internships or work/trade options for students.

Create classes that interest students. Mindbody's [Wellness Index](#) found that Gen Z is most interested in fitness classes like kickboxing, martial arts, and CrossFit®. Offering classes in these areas is a great way to strike up a relationship with young adults and students.

[For more ideas on marketing specifically to students, check out our guide](#)

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a light blue tank top and dark leggings, is rowing on a machine. She is leaning forward, gripping the handle with both hands. The background is bright and out of focus. A semi-transparent light blue box is overlaid on the image, containing the text "Maintain your momentum".

Maintain your momentum



As you make changes to welcome a wider range of customers, further your efforts with the right marketing and retention strategies:

Make sure your marketing imagery reflects your business, including imagery that's true to your business and showcases the welcoming environment you've established.

Leverage social and other channels to reach your new target demographics. For instance, Facebook is beneficial for connecting with older audiences while students and young adults prefer Instagram.

Build a community through events hosted both inside your facility and other locations around your community. Promote these events through your branded app and social media channels.



Your customers have various needs, and it's up to you and your brand to provide them. Doing so will create a more inclusive space for your community and be transformative for your business.

Mindbody welcomes and celebrates all people, regardless of their unique differences.

To learn first-hand how Mindbody can support your business, [schedule a guided tour today.](#)