

Shaping Up - Exercise Class Etiquette

By Mary Mitchell

I am addicted to spinning. No, I'm not talking about arts and crafts. Spinning is an awesome workout performed on a stationary bicycle that can simulate hills, flats, headwinds and mountains. The best news is that you don't have to steer. If spinning isn't your thing, chances are you're taking some other kind of group class in the gym. Some people seem to think it isn't necessary to exercise common sense and good manners in places where people exercise. The opposite is true.

Bad Manners Can Hurt More Than Someone's Feelings

When the fitness-minded get single-minded about their workouts, things can get pretty grim in the gym. People can lose all consideration for - or even awareness of - those around them. Maybe it's all those mirrors.

The very fact that gym activities are so "me"-based makes courtesy an absolute necessity to minimize distractions and to promote safety. It's a place where bad manners can cause physical injury to you or to others.

For example, never join an exercise group already in session: your arrival will be distracting to those in the group, and you may have missed important safety information given at the beginning of the workout. Here are some other considerations:

Dress for success. The key words are clean and functional. Avoid anything that drapes or dangles. Wearing jewelry while working out is downright stupid. Scanty, sexy dressing is inappropriate because it is distracting and embarrassing. In addition, you shouldn't walk around in flimsy footwear or stocking feet. And watch where you are going. Walking into a piece of equipment can result in a broken toe or foot.

Bag your gym bag. Somebody could trip over it, get tangled in the straps, and fall. Lock your gear in the dressing room.

Don't be a drinking problem. Keep your water in an enclosed, unbreakable container. Don't even think about bringing food into class.

Keep it quiet. Exercise your jaws outside of class, not by talking during the session. And those grunts and moans are unnecessary, theatrical and distracting. Rest those cell phones. They should be turned off or on silent mode.

Cleanliness is next to godliness. Marinated gym clothes (the kind you leave in the trunk of your car or your locker and then wear them again), fragrances and grime are guaranteed to help you lose friends and transform your group activity into a solitary performance.

Keep your cool. So what if you always work out in the corner but someone beat you to it this time? Group classes operate on a democratic system. Let off your steam in the workout; not by lobbing nasty salvos at the "offender."

Forget flying solo. By definition, classes are group activities. So forget about doing your own routine. Do your best to keep up with the class.

Don't crowd. Consider others' exercise space and don't crowd someone who has arrived in class before you.

Towel off. Not just yourself. Your equipment deserves to be wiped down, too.

Following these guidelines will guarantee a successful, safe and enjoyable workout. It's all about sportsmanship, really. And sportsmanship is simply good manners with an application of perspiration.