



When Rob Coad started out in personal training he thought it would be something he'd do on the side.

Little did he know that in less than a year it would become his sole occupation and in less than three years it would be a thriving business, employing 14 trainers and grossing \$500,000 per annum.

Rob is one of a growing number of fitness professionals Australia-wide who are making a go of it running a full-time personal training business. Whether setting up as a sole operator or as a franchisee, personal training has become a lucrative career option for many.

For those who have made the leap, there is little to regret. Job satisfaction, flexible working hours and the opportunity for advancement are the most commonly cited benefits of this career. To many it means the chance to help others and to pursue the active outdoor lifestyle they have always dreamt about.

In this ever-expanding industry there is plenty of room for success. Here we look at two very different personal training businesses and how they began.

ROB COAD, OWNER OF HEALTHY LIVING FITNESS, NORTH ADELAIDE, SA.

Getting rid of his flash 2003 Mazda 6 was the first sacrifice Rob had to make for his business, but since then he has never looked back. The car was traded for a second-hand van and laptop when Rob set himself up as a mobile PT in October 2005.

While working at the Adelaide Convention Centre as a casual customer relations officer, Rob undertook a part-time Master Trainer course at the Australian Institute of Fitness.

"The course gave me the green light to go and help others and that's when I decided it was worth setting up my own business," says Rob.

"I only had one client, who also happened to be a friend, but I didn't care because I was doing something I loved. It was an idea in the back of my mind that it would be great to make a business out of this, but I went into it thinking it would be more like a part-time hobby."

He'd come full circle since being medically discharged from the military at the age of 30 following an armoured vehicle accident that left him with spinal injuries. During the lengthy rehabilitation process that continued after his discharge, he became overweight and unfit.

"One day I decided to lose the weight and through training and eating well I lost 30 kilograms. It was from here I became interested in fitness and this led me to think about studying to be a personal trainer."

Through word-of-mouth and an advertisement in the local rag, Rob's business grew quickly to become a full-time concern. He gave up his job at the Adelaide Convention Centre and took on three new part-time trainers in August 2006, expanding his services beyond mobile training to include bootcamp group fitness sessions.

By July 2007 he had enough collateral to sign a lease on his own fitness studio. It's from here Rob operates his expanding business, running one-on-one studio sessions, outdoor group training, rehabilitation, bootcamps and adventure training.

His bootcamps are a highly successful part of the business and led to Rob's involvement as a conditioning coach for last year's Gladiators TV series.

"Running my own business has given me lots of opportunities I wouldn't otherwise have had. I enjoy the idea of being in control and having the final say— although this doesn't mean I'm always right!"

"I'm now at the stage where I can step back and let the business run itself. It blows me away when I think that it was only three years ago I started out in personal training!"



GRAEME & VICTORIA, OWNERS OF STEP INTO LIFE FRANCHISE, GLEBE, SYDNEY.

Two years ago, Graeme Salt and Victoria Morrison gave away their corporate jobs to run their own Step into Life group personal training franchise.

They now boast 85 clients and a successful business with an annual six-figure turnover.

Victoria explains that one of the reasons for their seachange was the need for a more flexible lifestyle as they were starting a family. "With Graeme working in public relations and me in corporate training in the financial world, we were spending too many hours chained to a desk."

Fitness was an important pastime to Graeme and he has always wanted to own his own business. Victoria has worked part time in the group fitness and personal training industry for 15 years and recently completed her Master Trainer Certification from the Australian Institute of Fitness.

When they looked into running their own Step into Life franchise, it seemed the perfect fit.

"We liked the fact that it was a proven success and that the start-up costs were reasonable," says Victoria.

"All the things we needed to run a successful business were provided: the uniform, brand, website, signage, business cards, advertising and marketing material. We thought, why reinvent the wheel when someone has done it all before. This would allow us to concentrate on building the business and generating income from day one, rather than spending a lot of time on development."

NSW Master Franchisee, Linda Schlencker, explains that Step into Life provides a strong support and mentoring network; "My role is to ensure our new franchisees are given every help they need to get their business up and running."

"Many people are nervous about handling the administration and marketing side of a small business, so it's a major advantage that we've done much of the hard work already. Our specialised software sorts out the billing and invoicing, as well as keeps track of clients' individual performance. For example, on any given week you

can look up whether any clients have missed sessions or whether you need to remember to send out birthday cards."

Graeme and Victoria's business is thriving and they are enjoying the change it has brought their lifestyle. "Within the first three months of starting out, we achieved a client base of 70—partly because we worked like mad doing leaflet drops, running advertisements and fronting up to the local shopping centre and bus stops to talk to whoever would listen!"

"Now we're at the position where we can really enjoy what we've built. We hold 17 classes a week but we don't teach all of these", says Graeme, "six are run by our two assistant instructors".

Each client pays between \$12-\$14 per session if they book in two or more times a week, and because it's group training, fewer sessions are required per week to make the same income as one-on-one training.

"We've never looked back", Graeme concludes, "how can you compare teaching 15 enthusiastic clients as the sun rises over the Anzac Bridge, to hanging around at a train station waiting to start the daily grind behind a desk?" ■