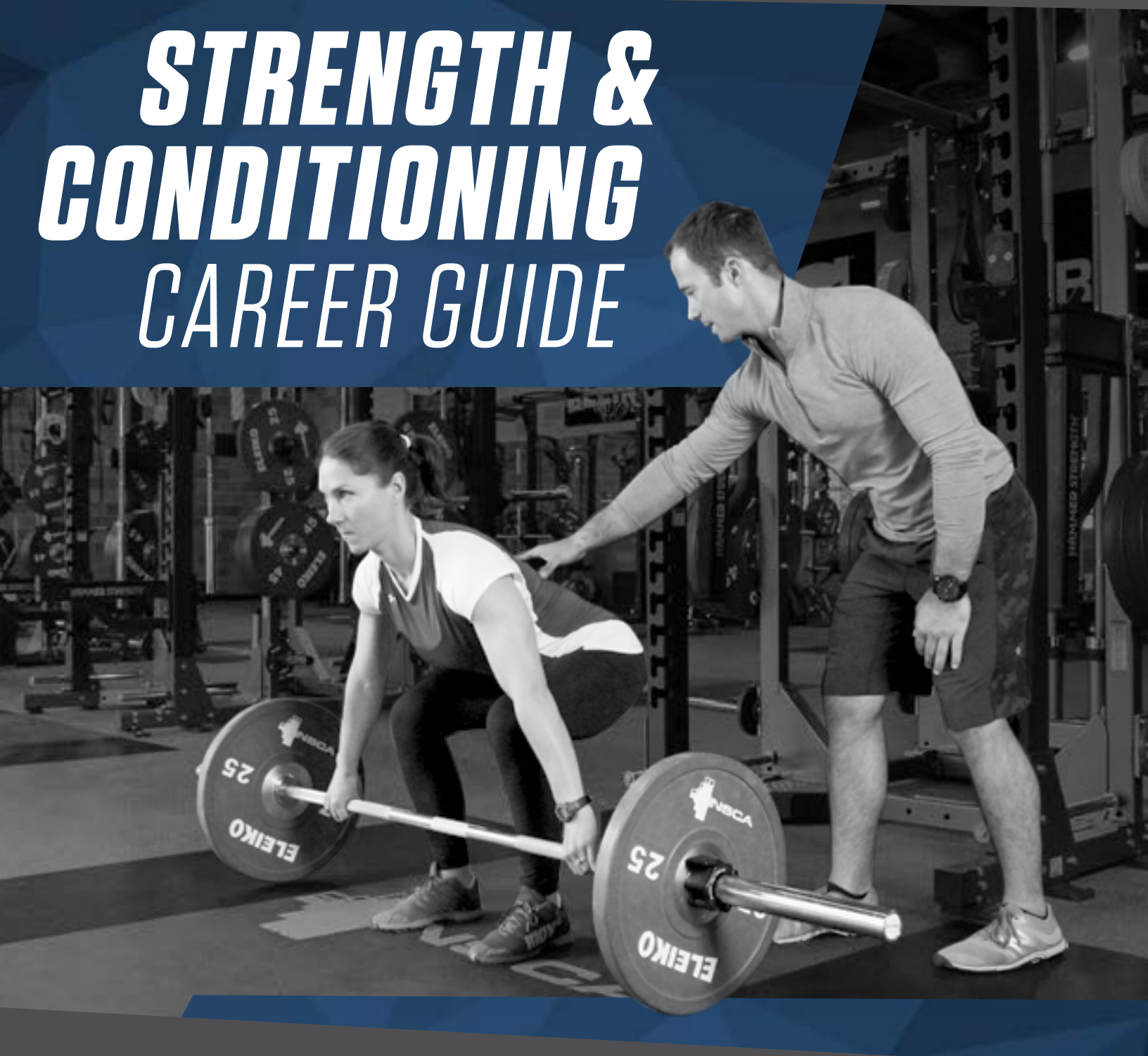




STRENGTH & CONDITIONING CAREER GUIDE



INSIGHTS AND TIPS FROM LEADERS IN THE FIELD



YOUR CAREER STARTS HERE

Do you aspire to help others discover and maximize their strengths by becoming a top-notch strength and conditioning coach, premier personal trainer, exceptional tactical facilitator, or esteemed professor or researcher? Finding the right career path is important and sometimes an overwhelming process. Whether you just graduated with an exercise science-related degree, recently obtained your first certification or are exploring career options this is a great place to begin. This guide contains practical career guidance from industry leaders on how to launch a successful career in the strength and conditioning field. This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of support the NSCA can provide you along your career journey.

EXAMPLES OF STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING CAREERS

STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH

College
High School
Professional
Tactical

PERSONAL TRAINING

Campus Recreation
Corporate Wellness
Fitness Entrepreneur
Health Care
Health Club

ACADEMIA

Collegiate
Other educational
institutions



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CONNECT TO EVIDENCE-BASED CONTENT AND A COMMUNITY OF PROFESSIONALS

There is no better way to understand strength and conditioning priorities, practices and people than by becoming an NSCA Member. Membership unlocks access to five strength and conditioning publications. From the research-rooted *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* to the applied *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, *NSCA Coach*, *Personal Training Quarterly* (PTQ) and *TSAC Report*, members are exposed to the latest research and practical application each month. In addition, membership provides unmatched discounts on certification exams, educational resources, videos and articles, and nearly 50 clinics and conferences each year. And, most important to many members, access to the industry-leading community of strength and conditioning professionals.

It's hard to put a price on the value of a colleague's insight, a needed referral, and the timely reference to a new opportunity. Discover the value of NSCA Membership at NSCA.com/Membership.

NSCA'S CELEBRATED CERTIFICATIONS

Seasoned and aspiring strength and conditioning professionals alike strive to earn NSCA certifications because they signify an accomplishment. NSCA's Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) and NSCA-Certified Personal Trainer® (NSCA-CPT®) were the first of their kind to be accredited by the independent National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). And this tradition of excellence continues with NSCA's Tactical Strength and Conditioning Facilitator® (TSAC-F®) and Certified Special Populations Specialist® (CSPS®). Perhaps that's why so many professional sports teams and a growing number of universities and training facilities require NSCA certifications for their professional staff.

Earning an NSCA certification won't be easy, but when was anything worthwhile in life easy? Learn more about our credentials at NSCA.com/Certification.



DISCOVER THE VALUE OF NSCA MEMBERSHIP AT NSCA.COM/MEMBERSHIP

HOW TO LAUNCH A SUCCESSFUL STRENGTH COACH CAREER

by Allen Hedrick, MA, CSCS,*D, RSCC*E, FNSCA

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Allen Hedrick provides a detailed introduction to launching a successful career as a strength and conditioning coach. If you're looking to become a strength coach, or are interested in learning more about this competitive yet fulfilling career, read this article. From obtaining the right degree(s) to providing appropriate references, Coach Hedrick's words provide insight into building a long-lasting strength and conditioning career.

Article Highlights:

- The profession is increasingly competitive; to be seriously considered for an entry-level coaching position, pursue a graduate degree in a related field.
- Gain hands-on experience while earning your Master's. Ideally, this would be through a GA position, but you might end up having to just volunteer your time.
- Always provide your supervisor as a reference. The most valuable information can come from the person who supervised you during your practical experience setting.
- Interact with other coaches at conferences and events! Some of the best learning opportunities occur when interacting with other strength and conditioning coaches.
- Remain hungry for knowledge. Find an area you want to learn more about, research it, and publish an article on it or give a presentation about it. It's a great learning tool.

I am honored to be asked by the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) to author an article on how to build a successful long-term career as a strength and conditioning coach. The NSCA has played such a significant role throughout my career, from breaking into the field and continuing on to where I am in my career today. My career began 25 years ago as a graduate assistant strength and conditioning coach at Fresno State University while I was pursuing a Master's degree in Exercise Science. Fittingly enough, I learned of the opening at Fresno State via the NSCA. How I ended up at Fresno State is a story in itself. I had applied and been accepted for graduate school at Brigham Young University (BYU). However, the head strength and conditioning coach there at the time, Chuck Stiggins, could not guarantee me a position right away in the strength and conditioning program.

Literally, just a few weeks before we were set to move to Provo, UT to attend BYU, a graduate assistant position at Fresno State University was advertised on the NSCA website. Since I am from California and because my wife has relatives in the Fresno area, it made sense to apply for the position. After interviewing with Roberto Parker, who was the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach there at the time, I was offered the position and ended up spending three years at Fresno State where I achieved my Master's degree and built experience working in the strength and conditioning program.

This leads me directly into my first bit of advice. I do not know how many times in my career someone who has just earned an undergraduate degree has contacted me asking about how to break into the field. My first bit of advice is that you have to continue on with your education and **acquire a graduate degree in a related field** (e.g., exercise science, kinesiology, strength and conditioning, etc.). As I share with those who have reached out to me, the profession is far too competitive; in most cases you might not be seriously considered for an entry level strength and conditioning coaching position without a graduate degree.

As I explain to them, if an assistant strength coach position opened up at Colorado State University-Pueblo (where I am currently employed) I would likely receive at least 40 applications. Of those 40, well over half of those applying would have earned a Master's degree. The first thing I am going to do with those 40 applications is to put them into two piles, those who have earned a graduate degree and those who have not. Those who have not achieved a graduate degree are no longer in consideration for the position.

I made the decision to acquire my graduate degree from Fresno State, rather than to attend BYU where I had been accepted, for one reason: I believed that gaining the experience right away in the strength and conditioning program at Fresno State was more important than the added prestige of graduating from BYU. By that I mean that, on a national level, graduating from BYU is likely to be more impressive to most people than graduating from Fresno State. However, for those people who were going to be reviewing my résumé and making a decision to hire me or someone else, I believed they would be more impressed with the fact that I had gained experience working in a collegiate strength and conditioning program and less concerned with what school's name happened to be on my diploma.

That brings me to my second bit of advice. You need to earn a Master's degree and you need to **gain experience working in a strength and conditioning facility** while you are earning that degree. The ideal situation is when you can be selected to fill a graduate assistantship position and be compensated for working in the strength and conditioning program while earning your graduate degree, like what I was able to do at Fresno State. However, the reality is that there are a limited number of those positions available. As a result, you may need to volunteer your time working in the strength and conditioning program. Initially you may not be filling any bigger responsibilities than cleaning the facility. However, if you are persistent, work hard, and continue to show up, oftentimes your position will grow into something more meaningful. Do whatever you have to do to begin building your résumé with practical experience in a strength and conditioning facility.

Why is gaining this practical experience so important? To go back to the example of the 40 applicants applying for that open position, I eliminated a portion of those by weeding out applicants who had not yet earned a Master's degree. Why hire someone with only an undergraduate degree when I can hire someone with a Master's degree? Scanning through those applicants left under consideration, the next thing I am going to look for is those who have practical experience working in a strength and conditioning facility. Why hire someone with a graduate degree with no experience, when I can hire someone with a graduate degree who actually has working experience? For me that is an easy choice.

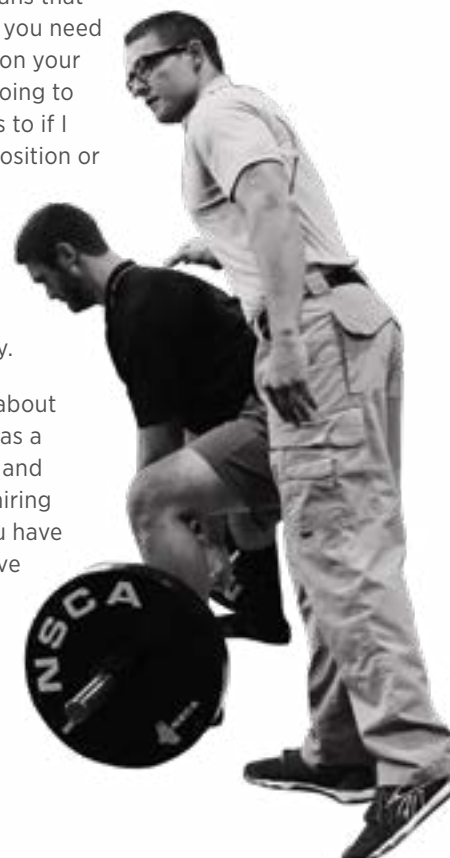


You can always improve the quality of the program you provide to your athletes year after year.

I now have a pile of applicants left who have a graduate degree and practical experience. Out of the 40 applicants I originally started with, I have eliminated those who do not have Master's degree or practical experience. My pile of qualified applicants is getting into a more manageable number to review, but I still have one more criteria to eliminate additional applicants from consideration. I will next look at the applicants left who have a graduate degree, practical experience, and have **earned the Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) certification through the NSCA**. Why hire someone with a graduate degree and practice experience but who is not certified when I have several applicants who meet all of the criteria I am looking for? Having that certification further separates those who I will consider for the position and those who are no longer in the running.

Of those candidates remaining, I will contact their references to hear from those who actually know and have interacted with the candidate. Of greatest interest to me will be to speak to the person who supervised them during their practical experience setting. I will want to hear about their coaching experiences, how they interacted with their athletes, their level of expertise, and the amount of responsibility displayed. This means that during your practical experience you need to make an excellent impression on your supervisor(s) because they are going to be the final determining factor as to if I decide to interview you for the position or not. If I get a good review of you from them and you meet all the previously discussed criteria, then more than likely I am going to at least take the time to call you and speak to you directly.

Up to this point, we have talked about how to get your foot in the door as a strength and conditioning coach and the criteria I will evaluate in the hiring process. Now we will assume you have your foot in the door and you have been hired for your first position as a strength and conditioning coach. Congratulations, but now the emphasis shifts from



getting the job to keeping the job. As I mentioned early in this article, this is a competitive profession, with lots of qualified individuals who are ready, willing, and qualified to take your job. Just because you have the job does not automatically mean you are going to keep the job. One of my responsibilities as the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach is to provide my athletes with the best possible staff.

As a result, you have a responsibility to the coaches and athletes you work with to continue to improve as a strength and conditioning coach. One of the things that I like most about the profession is that new information (especially from scientifically based peer-reviewed journals) is constantly being published. There are conferences and clinics held on a regular basis where highly qualified strength and conditioning coaches, exercise physiologists, and others related to the field discuss a variety of topics related to strength and conditioning.

I have said this for a long time now, if I ever believe I have developed the perfect program, or that there is no room for improvement, that is a clear sign that it is time for me to retire. I have been working in the strength and conditioning profession for 25 years and I constantly adjust the programs I provide to my athletes each year. For example, I recently read an article discussing intraset rest periods during a hypertrophy cycle. The information in the article made sense to me; I called one of the authors and spoke to him further about the article, and then implemented the intraset rest periods within the hypertrophy cycle that I provide to my football athletes. Based on the success I have had with these adjustments within the football program I will integrate the intraset rest periods into the hypertrophy cycles of the other teams I work with in the coming months. **You can always improve the quality of the program you provide to your athletes year after year.**

In regard to conferences, if you talk to coaches who regularly attend conferences, they will tell you some of the best learning opportunities occur not just in the formal presentations but in interacting with other strength and conditioning coaches between sessions in less formal settings. Most strength and conditioning coaches are always willing to share information with others in the field, if not in person then over the phone or via email. Just remember, in these situations you have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Another big benefit of interacting with strength and conditioning coaches in these settings is that oftentimes, when applying for a job, it is not just what you know but who you know. Think of it this way, if out of the 40 applicants I originally started with I am able to reduce that number down to 10 using my previously mentioned criteria. Out of those 10, I remember having had a long conversation with one of them

during lunch at the last conference I attended, that individual is likely to have the upper hand in being the one selected to fill the position.

One technique that I have used effectively for many years to improve myself as a strength and conditioning coach is to determine an area that I want to learn more about. Then I will research information related to that topic and publish an article discussing that subject. I enjoy researching an area of interest and then writing an article based on the information provided in the research. For me, it is a good learning tool and publishing is a good way to promote yourself. I can honestly say many of the experiences I have had as a strength and conditioning coach (i.e., speaking internationally, serving on the NSCA Board of Directors, and being named the NSCA Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coach of the Year) are directly or indirectly related to the publishing I have done throughout my career.

Speaking at conferences or clinics can serve the same purpose for you. Determine a subject matter you would like to speak on. Perform the necessary research to be able to make a presentation that provides valid, up-to-date information. This way you better your own knowledge base on the chosen subject and share that information with others in the profession, which is really what the NSCA is all about. And, of course, speaking at a conference or clinic is another great way to promote yourself. You never know, there may be someone in the crowd listening to you who may be the key to you getting that next opportunity.

There is not another profession I would choose over being a strength and conditioning coach. I enjoy helping my athletes improve their athletic performance and I enjoy working with the coaches and athletes towards attaining a common goal. Perhaps even more important, this career path allows the opportunity to improve self discipline, work ethic, and the ability to work together with teammates and coaches. All of those attributes will be of value to them in both their personal and professional lives.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Allen Hedrick is the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at Colorado State University-Pueblo. Previously, Hedrick was the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at the United States Air Force Academy, the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), and the United States Olympic Training Center. Hedrick was named the NSCA's Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coach of the Year in 2003. Frequently published in various journals, Hedrick has authored books on football and dumbbell training, written chapters in three textbooks related to strength and conditioning, and spoken at numerous conferences and clinics both nationally and internationally.

BECOMING A HIGH SCHOOL STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH

by Patrick McHenry, MA, CSCS,*D, RSCC

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Coach McHenry provides a path for education, certification, knowledge, and networking essential to excelling as a successful high school strength and conditioning coach.

There are two different ways to become a high school strength coach; you can become a certified teacher (preferably in Physical Education) or you can be hired to work as the strength coach after school and during the summer. While getting your Bachelor's degree, some colleges and universities will require that you take education classes which will allow you to graduate with a four-year degree and qualify you to take a test to become a licensed teacher. Other colleges and universities will have the teaching education program and the specific content area included together.

The difference being that in the first example you will graduate with a degree in Physical Education and then have to go back and take teaching education classes to fulfill the student teaching requirement; whereas, in the second example you will have a degree in Physical Education and have completed your student teaching requirement before you graduate. For those coaches who have a four-year degree and do not have the teaching requirements, check with the local college to see if you can take the classes necessary to become a teacher. **Along with a degree, each state has a test to become a licensed teacher.** Having a teaching license in one state does not carry over to another. Check with the local department of education for state laws.



The Educator/Coach

If you are an academic teacher, the salary and benefits package can make for a comfortable living. It can also give you stability not seen in other coaching professions. One of the most important factors of being an academic teacher is the connection made with the students on a day-to-day basis outside the sports realm. Being an academic teacher will require you to teach a full load (i.e., seven classes that are 45 minutes long, or three classes that are 90 minutes long) and then coach when the school day is done. You will be paid as a teacher and as a coach. Coaching pay is by season (fall/winter/spring) and is not part of your regular salary.

THE DEDICATED COACH

As a strength coach who comes in after school, the benefits and salary will be limited. Each school will have different requirements and responsibilities for an outside coach. A number of states require a coach who is not an academic teacher to go through a background check and a coaching class. Talk to the athletic director to determine your workload and for which teams you will be responsible. The more teams and responsibilities you have, the higher the pay range will be. Normally, coaches that are not academic teachers do not receive health benefits and are only paid for the seasons that they work in the weight room.

MY COACHING PATH

I was fortunate that my first strength coach position required only a Colorado Teaching License and a National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) credential. There were many coaches who worked at the college level who held a Master's degree and a CSCS® and not licensed teachers. There were also licensed physical education teachers who did not have a CSCS® so they were also not considered. When I changed high schools, there were more than 100 applications for my position; however, only three applicants had both the teaching license and the CSCS®.

When I first started teaching, I worked at an elementary school and a middle school, and then I would drive to the high school to coach football and open the weight room after school in the off-season. When I was hired as the high school strength coach, I had to quit coaching a sport so I could have the weight room open before and after school for all the teams. Now I open, coach, and supervise the weight room before and after school. During school hours I teach four classes that last 90 minutes.

This enables me to develop and coach strength and conditioning programs for our athletes in all sports. Having responsibility for the strength and conditioning programs before and after school allows the sport coaches free time to work on sport-specific plans while I supervise the strength and conditioning programs. It works well for the athletic trainer because he and I can talk about the students who are injured and watch for injury trends.

At first, I missed working after school as a football coach. However, the more teams I worked with the better I became as a strength coach. Now, the diversity makes my job exciting. I get to work with a variety of sport teams including football, golf, swimming, gymnastics, basketball, lacrosse, and wrestling, to name a few. Another great challenge is the range of working with eighth graders who have never lifted before as compared to working with high school seniors who are preparing to compete in college athletics. Although they may play the same sport, their programs are completely different.

GAIN KNOWLEDGE

Twenty years ago when I was in college, classes such as kinesiology, exercise physiology, and biomechanics were not as prevalent. In fact, the only people who took those classes were going to medical school. It was not until two years after I graduated with my undergraduate degree and I started looking for a Master's degree program that these courses of study became the standard. Today, there are numerous universities that offer Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees in exercise science and related fields. The numbers of educational opportunities offered today are endless. Find a program that will meet your needs and allow you to see all the different options that are available. (NSCA recognizes college and university programs that meet its standards through NSCA's Education Recognition Program [ERP].)

NETWORK

Finding and working as an intern in a strength and conditioning program will give you a great advantage and will be invaluable when you start applying for full-time positions. **The best approach is to find a mentor that will give you experience and a quality education at the same time.** I was lucky to work with several experienced personal trainers and strength coaches and was able to learn from them. This experience provided networking opportunities that led me to other strength coaches who allowed me to work under their supervision so I could expand my knowledge and experience.

Attendance at National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) conferences is another way to expand your knowledge and networking. This is a major benefit of NSCA membership as events and symposia can provide limitless opportunities to network, expand your knowledge, and discover job opportunities. I still remember my first NSCA National Conference in Denver, CO. The following year, I took the USA Weightlifting course where I met several other strength coaches who would later attend the National Conference in San Diego, CA. At my second National Conference, I took the CSCS® exam and followed up with the coaches I had previously met. We stayed in contact and they introduced me to other coaches; this led to my first presentation at a NSCA State Clinic. Each



The CSCS® will give you an exceptional professional advantage and separate you from those who only want to 'work in the weight room.'

conference I attended improved my educational level and as I networked with more coaches, more doors were opened for me. I volunteered to help at a NSCA Coaches College Conference in the early 1990s and was allowed to present.

I knew the only way to get better was to become involved, so I applied to be on the NSCA Education Committee.

Three years on the committee helped me meet more coaches and gave me more opportunities. I became involved with the NSCA and through that involvement my career as a strength and conditioning coach has improved.

GET ENGAGED

I knew the best way to develop myself as a presenter was to start small and work my way up. I knew most of the coaches so I would receive honest feedback. I also listened to those speakers at the NSCA National Conference who I felt were the best in their area. I took their style, mechanics, and tips to better my own presentations. After I felt comfortable at the local clinic, I volunteered to speak at a regional conference. Finally, I presented at the NSCA National Conference as part of a panel. By having a distinguished group to work with, it gave me the confidence to speak on my own. The more I presented at local, state, and national conferences the more opportunities I got. This included trips to both China and Puerto Rico.

After my Education Committee term expired I volunteered to be on the High School Coaches Special Interest Group (SIG). While working with this group I was asked to write a chapter for the NSCA's Strength and Conditioning Manual for High School Coaches. I wrote two chapters on my own and collaborated on a third. This experience showed me how to write for a wider audience. With the final copy in hand, I talked to a publisher and showed him that I could write. I pitched my book idea and co-authored it with another coach. Our book was accepted and now we have two books and a video about strength training. Because I enjoyed writing, I looked for other opportunities within the NSCA to become involved. I am currently an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* and have written for the *NSCA's Performance Training Journal*.

KEEP GROWING

An organization is only as good as its members. What do you want from the NSCA? What are you willing to give to the NSCA? Every time I have volunteered to be on a committee, helped with a project, or wrote a paper, I have gained from that experience. **To be a quality strength coach you have to keep learning and expanding.** Reading, going to conferences, and meeting other strength coaches has helped me develop into the coach/teacher I am today. Even the little things, like sitting down for coffee with other coaches to pick their brains for ideas, or reading a wide variety of scientific journals, it all helps me to continuously grow.



The NSCA helped me get my first job because I was a CSCS® and a licensed teacher. The professional connections that I have developed over the years are priceless and have given me opportunities to become published, visit other states, and go around the world to speak and learn. It all started by networking with coaches who attended the same conferences I did.

My words of advice: go to as many NSCA conferences, clinics, and workshops as you can, volunteer to help at these events, meet as many coaches as you can, and never stop learning from those coaches.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick McHenry is the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at Castle View High School in Castle Rock, CO. In 2003, McHenry was the Regional Strength Coach of the Year for American Football Monthly. In 2005, he was the National

Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) High School Strength Coach of the Year and in 2006, he received the Editorial Excellent Award from the Strength and Conditioning Journal (SCJ). He received the Strength of America Award in 2010 from the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition (PCFSN). In 2012, McHenry was the Colorado High School Physical Education Teacher of the year.

BECOMING A STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH AT A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

by Michael Favre, MEd, CSCS,*D, RSCC*D

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This article encompasses some of the necessary experience, education, certifications, and personal development needed to become a strength and conditioning coach in the college/university setting.

Collegiate strength and conditioning is a profession with far more applicants than there are positions; therefore, you must discover ways of making yourself stand out from the competition. Make no mistake; **landing a job in the collegiate setting is a definite competition.** So, how do you set yourself apart from your peers? I am going to detail some necessary steps in order to exceed the standards and be prepared to progress within the collegiate strength and conditioning setting.

Before I go into the professional preparation aspects of succeeding as a Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coach, I feel an obligation to discuss the personal traits and abilities that are coveted within this field. These include the ability to communicate (verbal and written, to an individual or group), attention to detail, a high level of initiative, and above all else... integrity.

The ability to convey a clear and concise message while communicating, both verbally and in writing, is imperative to succeed in this profession.

Successful communication is not only important to coaching student-athletes, but integral in working with coaches, sports medicine professionals, administrators, and the media. Many of these previously mentioned groups require a different style and tone of communication. Developing your ability

and confidence to speak to individuals and large groups will enhance your ability to coach, interview, land a job, and progress within the field. Universities are going to hire those who can represent them well in the public eye, and communication plays a big role in this. Speaking is a skill that requires dedicated practice.

Attention to detail is the ability to accomplish tasks completely and accurately, no matter how big or small. Keep in mind, no part of being a collegiate strength coach is insignificant. Those with such ability clearly demonstrate their value to current and prospective employers. To harness this ability, it should encompass your entire life, not just your time in the weight room. Initiative is the capacity to energetically assess and initiate projects independently. Employers desire individuals that are self-motivated. Earning



The ability to convey a clear and concise message while communicating, both verbally and in writing, is imperative to succeed in this profession.

a reputation, and having documentation of such, will go a long way in separating yourself from other applicants. Supervisors want people that can and will go beyond the job requirements.

Integrity refers to possessing and steadfastly adhering to high moral principles and/or professional standards. It can also be defined as “honesty.” Experience and knowledge can be gained over time by those with the desire, but integrity is who we are. **Maintaining one’s integrity requires constant vigilance, but only requires a momentary lapse in judgment to be lost.**

I will tie these traits into the professional aspects of strength and conditioning in the following section.

EDUCATION

Attaining the proper education is not only the first step, but also paramount for the strength and conditioning coach. The proper education consists of an undergraduate degree in an exercise science-related field. Such a degree is imperative because it forms the foundation of knowledge that underpins the profession. An exercise science-related degree affords the capability to practice an evidence-based approach to strength and conditioning. What exactly is “evidence-based”? According to published research, evidence-based

refers to “a systematic approach to the training of athletes and clients based on the current best evidence from peer-reviewed research and professional reasoning” (1). In other words, your programs and methodology agree with the literature. Just receiving such a degree is not enough; you should endeavor to excel within the program. Just scraping by will not demonstrate that you have a solid understanding of the principles necessary to be a successful practitioner, nor does it act as evidence of a high level of attention to detail and initiative. Also, academic success as an undergraduate is necessary and can be measured by your grade point average (GPA). Your GPA should be over 3.0 to be considered for acceptance into most graduate degree programs. Attaining a graduate assistant position is often necessary in order to progress to a full-time job as a collegiate strength coach.

A graduate degree in an exercise science or related field in order to progress within the profession is becoming increasingly more common. Many assistant coach job advertisements state, “Master’s degree preferred.” Although preferred for the assistant, it is more often than not, mandatory for a head strength coach position. Pursuing and earning such a degree would be in the best interest of professional preparation and a sign of initiative.





FURTHER EDUCATION

In addition to earning both an undergraduate and graduate degree, is the need for further education in strength and conditioning related areas. This further education will often be on your own time and under your own initiative. Professional certifications, courses, workshops, symposia, conferences, and personal study all fall under this heading. Many of the world's brightest minds and most successful strength and conditioning coaches present at these courses, workshops, symposia, and conferences. Attending these events can help provide an excellent learning opportunity to help bridge the gap between theory and practice. Conferences also afford the individual the occasion to meet and speak to these respected professionals. Take advantage of any chance to network. **The more people you know—and more importantly the more people that know you—the greater your opportunities within the field.**

Personal study is an often-overlooked area. This area refers to activities like reading relevant literature and books, site visits, practicing program planning and design, and becoming proficient in executing the various exercises and movements you will be prescribing. The journey of discovery only begins with our formal education. You must continue to investigate and learn if you wish to remain relevant.

National Strength and Conditioning Association

(NSCA) Membership: Membership in related professional organization is very important to your professional development. Benefits of being a member of the NSCA include access to current research and practical application that covers a variety of important subjects that will assist you in continuing your education. Membership publication benefits include access to five peer-reviewed publications and a variety of online educational materials. As a member, you can also receive significant discounts on NSCA events and certification exam registration.

NSCA Certification: Certifications are another critical way to demonstrate proof of your commitment to development in this field. NSCA's Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) requires many hours of study to prepare to take and obtain this certification. This intensive study will afford you a better understanding of the principles and methodologies that form the foundation of the strength and conditioning profession. A majority of full-time jobs, along with many internships and graduate assistantships, now prefer, if not require, the CSCS® in order to be considered for the job. Certifications are another way to prove your attention to detail and initiative.

EXPERIENCE

Practical, hands-on experience is a requirement for the strength and conditioning profession and is vital to your success and longevity in the field. This experience includes executing and coaching the various exercises and routines that are implemented within the profession, leadership, along with familiarity of weight room management, and working within a collegiate athletic department. These areas are the foundation of being a collegiate strength coach. First, you must not only be able to demonstrate the movements and routines you will be coaching, but you must be a “technician” of them. Becoming proficient will require years of dedicated practice. Seeking out the help of experts will greatly enhance your chances of mastering these exercises. **Your proficiency is a direct representation of your attention to detail and initiative.**

Coaching: Coaching prescribed movements and routines is another area that will require years of focused commitment. In order to become adept at coaching, you must place yourself in a coaching situation with successful veteran strength and conditioning coaches. Observation and practice will enhance not only your ability and confidence to teach technique, but your ability to recognize and correct mistakes.

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The time you commit to practicing this is directly correlated to how quickly and efficiently you learn. Remember, when coaching a group of collegiate athletes, they consider you the subject matter expert; do not let them down. Teaching many of these exercises, especially the weightlifting movements like cleans, snatches, and jerks, is not something you can talk them through. You must be able to demonstrate the movement correctly, explain it, and then coach them through the movement. Being a “technician” in regard to all aspects of coaching greatly increases your chances of progressing within the profession.

Leadership: Leadership refers to influencing others to accomplish an objective and directing an organization in such a way that it operates in a more coherent and cohesive fashion. Your ability to communicate effectively and your integrity will contribute greatly to your leadership potential. In order to realize this potential you will need hands-on experience in leadership situations.

Weight room management: Weight room management refers to organizing the room, staff, and schedule in such a way to as to ensure the most efficient use of time and resources. This is another area that will require time and practice to become proficient. The most specific experience to becoming an effective strength coach will come from the collegiate setting.

Internships: Internships provide an excellent means of introducing a young, aspiring strength and conditioning coach to the field. During an internship, you will get the opportunity to work alongside veteran strength and conditioning coaches and observe how they coach technique, manage the floor and athletes, write their programs, and display leadership. Just participating in an internship is not enough to ensure your progression within this profession; you must exceed the minimum requirements by maximizing your time and volunteering whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. You will receive a great deal of education as part of the curriculum of most internships, but do not rely solely on this; seek out additional opportunities to learn. In addition, by enhancing your coaching ability, it displays your enthusiasm and initiative for strength and conditioning. As mentioned previously, your time carrying out the duties of a CSCC is directly correlated to how quickly and efficiently you learn.

Excelling in an internship is a great way of establishing a reputation as a good strength and conditioning coach. Impressing your supervisors not only provides great references, but can open up job opportunities as well. A successful internship is often correlated to your contribution to the strength and conditioning staff, or better yet, their perception of your contribution. In order to contribute, you are going to need to have an obvious desire to work and learn. The skills and traits that strength and conditioning

INTERNSHIP SKILLS AND TRAITS



coaches are looking for from their interns is the ability and confidence to demonstrate and teach exercise technique properly, the ability and confidence to communicate to individuals and groups, a keen attention to detail, and an untiring level of initiative.

Often, if you wait until the opportunity arrives before learning how to carry out the requirements it is already too late. You must constantly prepare for the demands of this profession.

It is time to pursue a graduate assistant position once a successful internship, an undergraduate degree, NSCA Membership, and a CSCS® certification are all completed. These positions are very competitive. The criteria applicants are assessed on include grades, communication, experience, and references. I mentioned the importance of grades previously not only to qualify for graduate school, but as evidence of an attention to detail and initiative. Your communication will be assessed during the interview process, specifically your ability to clearly articulate yourself. Experience will focus around internships and volunteer work related to collegiate strength and conditioning for the most part. Your references will be very important to verifying your experience, qualifications, and traits.

Finally, always do your best. You must leave a positive impression with your current employers. Prospective employers will contact them; how will they describe you?

CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROFESSION

Contributing to the profession is a great way of demonstrating your value to potential employers. Publishing articles and presenting at conferences are a couple of great ways to contribute. Peer-reviewed publications are the obvious “gold standard” when it comes to articles, but there are other ways that can strengthen your résumé and communication skills. These include trade journals, websites, and newsletters. Writing is definitely a skill that requires dedicated practice. In addition to practicing, one should seek the help of professionals who are proficient at writing.

Presenting on strength and conditioning-related topics is another great way to exhibit your communication skills and knowledge within the field. It also demonstrates your confidence. Standing on a podium and presenting your thoughts, programs, and understanding of the science to sport coaches, scientists, your peers, and even student-athletes is a serious undertaking that requires much practice to become proficient and comfortable. Public speaking is another good way of getting your name out there, along with further separating yourself from your competition by exhibiting your initiative.

APPLICATION PROCESS

When applying for jobs, follow the instructions exactly; they were created for a reason. The application process is your first opportunity to demonstrate your ability to follow instructions. Your inability to do so will most likely result in you being eliminated from the applicant pool.

Besides following the instructions, make sure you meet the minimum qualifications. For example, do not confuse “required” with “preferred.” With regard to qualifications, make sure your résumé is up to date and accurate. Your résumé is your first opportunity to demonstrate your experience and your integrity. There is no “grey area” here; you either did what you listed or you did not. Make sure to list everything you have done, and be honest about it. Remember, people will hire those they believe they can trust.

Your cover letter is of great importance. This letter is a simple summation of who you are and why you are the right choice—not a regurgitation of your résumé. This is an opportunity to demonstrate your communication skills, so a high level of attention to detail is imperative. It is advisable to seek help and guidance with preparing this letter. **Mistakes will often lead to being eliminated from the applicant pool.** Common mistakes include listing the wrong institutions or addresses, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. When you reach the interview stage, there are two formats you may encounter: the phone interview and the on-site interview. The phone interview requires you to demonstrate highly developed verbal communication. The on-site interview requires this as well, but in addition you will have a face-to-face meeting with

your potential employers. It is crucial that you appear and conduct yourself as the professional you wish others to recognize you as, because first impressions are a reality. Thus, dressing for success is highly advisable. What does this mean? At a minimum, it means semi-formal attire (e.g., collared shirt, slacks, dress, skirt, etc.). Formal attire (e.g., suit and tie) is preferred. You must convey the image that you are a professional. Arriving in a t-shirt and thread-barren shorts does not convey such an image. Remember, first impressions are paramount to success.

Not only should you appear to be a professional, you must conduct yourself as one. During the interview, speak clearly and concisely; do not rush your answers, think before you speak. Try to offer specific answers rather than hypothetical responses. In other words, tell them what you have done rather than what you would do.

The interview process is also a chance to interview the interviewer(s) and show your interest in working there. Make sure to ask questions. Research the school, athletic department, and strength and conditioning team. Most school websites will have a great deal of information available. Be prepared to answer such questions as, “what do you like most about our university/athletic department,” “what can you tell me about our strength and conditioning philosophy,” and “why do you want to work here?” Your responses will demonstrate to your interviewer(s) your level of interest for this position.

CONCLUSION

Once full-time employment is attained, the journey is far from over. You must continue to hone your craft following many, if not all, of the principles and ideas mentioned in this article. **The value of NSCA membership cannot be understated, as this will provide access to networking opportunities, further education, and numerous events to expand your professional development.** Never stop looking for ways to improve your abilities, your department, or your profession. Strive to leave a trail of success and positive impressions wherever you go.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Favre, the NSCA 2011 College Strength Coach of the Year, has been the Director of Olympic Sports Strength and Conditioning at the University of Michigan since 2009. During his 17 years in the field, Michael has held positions

at the United States Olympic Committee, the Scottish Institute of Sport, Temple University, La Salle University, the Arizona Diamondbacks, and Arizona State University. He also frequently presents and publishes on strength and conditioning-related topics.

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH

by Matthew Krause, MA, ATC, CSCS

•••••
Coach Krause discusses the five essential steps on the path to a successful career as a professional strength and conditioning coach.

Now is a great time to become a strength and conditioning coach. The field of strength and conditioning is expanding in all directions, opening up new and exciting job opportunities in high schools, colleges and universities, at the graduate level, in professional sports, in performance facilities, and in the military—and the opportunities are continuing to grow.

When I was breaking into the field 15 years ago, there were only graduate assistant jobs with the prospect of being hired by a college or university, or by a National Football League (NFL) team (most high school strength coaches also served as an assistant football coach at the time). Strength and conditioning positions in the National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), and Major League Baseball (MLB) were just beginning to be developed. That was only 15 years ago. In just over a decade, the strength and conditioning profession has expanded with an increased demand for qualified strength and conditioning coaches in all arenas that require safe, progressive strength and conditioning programs for their athletes.

Serving as the Strength and Conditioning Coach for Major League Baseball's Cincinnati Reds for the past 12 years has taught me firsthand what is needed for success as a professional strength and

conditioning coach. Since the bulk of my experience is in Major League Baseball, points related to the culture of a sport will be specific to professional baseball in this article. However, the personal qualities needed for success and tips for preparing to enter the world of strength and conditioning can be applied across many professional sports, including the NFL, NBA, NHL, Major League Soccer (MLS), and National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR).

I do not know where you are in life—graduating from high school, attending college, or in the process of changing careers—but for me, I started to understand myself and what I wanted to do when I got out of the military. But at some point, you need to figure out that you want to become a strength and conditioning coach and help others maximize their physical potential. The days of transitioning from a sport coach to a strength coach are limited or are already over. **Sports teams are requiring and only hiring certified strength and conditioning coaches to care for their athletes.**

For example, if you think one day you want to be the person in the MLB who oversees the whole organization, major and minor leagues, the one who designs and implements the strength program, conditioning program, core program, running and speed program, flexibility

program, nutrition, performance testing, and handle the administrative duties for the in-season, off-season and spring training, this is not something you can just jump into. On the next page are five things you will need to do (that will be covered in further detail later).

Since I have been through the process, I will share my journey to the world of strength and conditioning in professional sports. In high school, I was a three-sport athlete and always knew that I wanted to work in sports in some capacity. Since I did not have money for college, I joined the Marine Corps Reserves to earn money for school. When I attended college, I chose the Sports Medicine and Exercise Science track in the College of Education at East Carolina University. While there, I worked multiple sports, worked every camp they would allow, wrote many letters to strength coaches, and did whatever I was told to do by my superiors.

By the time I left East Carolina, I had my Bachelor of Science degree in Sports Medicine and Exercise Science, Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) Certification, United States Weightlifting Club Coach Certification (now a Level 1 Sport Performance Coach Certification), CSCS®, and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation/Automated External Defibrillator (CPR/AED) Certification. From there, I went to the University of Central Florida (UCF) as a graduate assistant strength coach and worked as many sports as they would give me, worked camps, served an internship for the Chicago Cubs (MLB), helped with a mini-camp for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (NFL), and received a Master's degree in Exercise Physiology. I was then hired as a full-time assistant at UCF for two more years and, through my Cubs connection, got a job with the Pittsburgh Pirates (MLB) for three years. Currently, I have been with the Reds for more than a decade.



5 MUST-DO'S TO BECOME A PROFESSIONAL STRENGTH COACH



Before you decide that you want a career as a strength coach for a professional team, you need to understand how to prepare yourself, the expectations of the position, and the personal qualities that will help you succeed. The following provides greater detail of the five steps previously mentioned that are essential to being a successful strength and conditioning coach.

FIVE ESSENTIAL STEPS ON THE PATH TO A SUCCESSFUL CAREER AS A PROFESSIONAL STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH

1. Education

Choose the college or university program that offers an exercise science track. Some exercise science tracks are in the school of education and others may be in the departments of exercise physiology, kinesiology or sports medicine. I chose the exercise and sports medicine track. The sports medicine influence has benefitted me greatly

since about 10% of my job is Phase 4 rehab, which is important when dealing with return-to-play criteria and working in partnership with your medical staff. Once you have earned your degree, you are ready for certification.

2. Certification

Professional teams will require a minimum standard of at least the National Strength and Conditioning Association's (NSCA) CSCS® certification to be hired as a strength and conditioning coach. Check the NSCA website and order the materials necessary for you to prepare for the test. The MLB has set a new standard for rookie ball. At the rookie ball level, a strength coach must have earned the CSCS® certification, but at the double-A through major league levels the strength coaches must also be an NSCA Registered Strength and Conditioning Coach (RSCC). There is always a potential for liability when working with professional athletes. Sports teams that employ million-dollar athletes hold you liable if an athlete is harmed due to your instruction or advice.

CHECK OUT
[NSCA.COM/RSCG-PROGRAM](https://www.nscapedia.com/rscg-program)
TO APPLY FOR THE RSCG RECOGNITION

As a protection, the MLB requires that each coach purchase liability insurance. To practice as a strength and conditioning coach in the MLB, you must have the minimal level of personal liability insurance, as offered through the NSCA. As an MLB strength coach, I am a Registered Strength and Conditioning Coach (RSCC) and hold this recognition with Distinction (RSCC*D). This shows your future employer that you have the CSCS® certification and you have had a minimum of ten years of full-time experience working in a sports team environment.

The registry also ensures that you are up to date with continuing education modules. Continuing education is essential for keeping current on all aspects of strength and conditioning. Experience working at personal training and performance facilities would not qualify as continuing education approved by the registry, but working in college sports would.

3. Internship/Graduate Assistantship

You have earned your degree and are now certified. The next step along your path is gaining experience. It is time to put your knowledge into practice. The best way to learn the ropes is to observe and work under the tutelage of a certified strength coach. Working under a strength coach who is not certified will not provide you the level of expertise and practical experience necessary for success at the professional level.

Although most curricula at the college or university level require an internship as part of your degree, you will need more targeted, specific experience working with sport teams. **In order to succeed, individuals must be willing to work for an extended period, and for long hours under the supervision of a certified strength and conditioning coach**, preferably one that holds the RSCC recognition. It is likely that a one-semester internship will not give you the expertise, experience, and confidence you need to perform at the professional level.

Find an opportunity that will challenge you and allow you to get involved, such as applying for a graduate assistantship or working at your local high school, college, or university. Most professional sports teams have internship positions. But you should know upfront that there may be one or two internship positions and hundreds of applicants. Be prepared to fill out many applications; you will most likely not get your first choice. Remember this is a process, so you must be patient, persistent, and ready to do whatever the position demands.

I remember writing many letters to Division I and professional strength coaches while I was an undergraduate student. I have 33 manuals sitting on my office shelf that were sent to me by strength coaches who were willing to help young people become successful in the profession by sharing their knowledge. Of course, as in any walk of life, you will run into a few strength and conditioning coaches who think they know everything. Some will think they have the “secret” and will not speak to you.

But most of the coaches in this industry are knowledgeable, hardworking, and willing to help. It is because these strength coaches act with professionalism and collegiality that our profession is increasing in respect and growing in opportunities. Get yourself involved and listen, listen, listen.



Remember, you have just reached the tip of the iceberg and have much to learn, so listen to your mentors, and follow directions. If you cannot do these two simple things, nobody will be willing to recommend you for a job.

Remember, you have just reached the tip of the iceberg and have much to learn, so listen to your mentors, and follow directions. If you cannot do these two simple things, nobody will be willing to recommend you for a job.

An internship or graduate assistantship provides the perfect entry into the field, offering you the opportunity to get firsthand experience and begin the next step.

4. Network to Find a Job

Now you have to hustle. Hopefully during your time gaining entry-level experience you were also networking, attending NSCA conferences, and introducing yourself to colleagues and other sports medicine professionals, such as certified athletic trainers, physical therapists, sports dietitians, and sports medicine physicians. The advantage of being an NSCA Member is having access to a broad network with relevant job listing/opportunities, events and symposia specific to the profession, and in earning strong recommendations by attending these events.

Another avenue for job opportunities is to regularly check online sources. The NSCA has a site with job postings at www.NSCA.com. You can also look on the websites of each of the professional sports teams. For instance, check the Professional Baseball Strength and Conditioning Coach Society website (PBSCCS) www.baseballstrength.org. This is where most baseball teams post jobs. Understand that the jobs posted on this site are mostly minor-league, entry-level jobs. If baseball is the path you hope to take, unless your hometown has a minor league team and you have a job lined up with them, plan on moving. When you land a job with a minor-league baseball team, you will be assigned to a city where one of the minor-league teams is located. An important consideration when contemplating a career in any professional sport is that you will be moving more than once during your career.

5. Commitment

You have your degree, your certifications, and you now have experience. During your internship, graduate assistantship, or entry-level job, you should have learned that being a strength coach means long hours, many consecutive days without an off-day, modest salaries, limited family time during the season, keeping complete records, paperwork, managing people, and lots of administrative duties that have nothing to do with working with your athletes.

So, you still want to be a head strength coach for a professional sports franchise? Understand that this job will be very different from working with high school students or college student athletes. Once you get to the professional ranks, you will no longer have a teacher-student relationship. You will have a professional working relationship. Your athletes will be working professionals earning salaries, and you will be a professional earning a salary. This distinction will affect the relationship between you and your athletes.

If you are the type of coach that needs more control of your athletes and used to barking out orders, expecting the athletes to follow them without question, working at the professional level is not for you! The culture of each professional sport is unique, but some facets are common across the board. At the professional level, you work in a setting where you must interact with owners, unions, agents, front office personnel, coaching staffs, and medical staffs. In baseball, your athletes will range from 18-year-olds to players in their early 40s.

Players will be at different stages of their careers and most of them will have some type of injury history. You will need to earn trust—the trust of your owners, general managers, coaching staff, and medical staffs. You will be called into meetings to explain, or sometimes defend, your ideas in a way that these team members understand. **Remember, it is their careers and their livelihoods; your job is to help them be the best that they can be.** The organization needs to believe that you have their best interests at heart and players need to feel that you care about them and their careers before anyone will buy into your programs. Each member of the organization must be convinced that you are committed!

To be successful as a professional strength and conditioning coach you need to use all of your knowledge, all of your creativity, all of your energy, and all of your patience to get through every day. If this sounds exciting to you, start with Step 1 and go for it.

It is a grind, and it is not easy. But I LOVE it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Krause is currently the Director of Strength and Conditioning for the New York Yankees Major League Baseball (MLB) organization. Previously, he spent 12 seasons in the Cincinnati Reds organization. He sits on the

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A CAREER IN SPORTS PERFORMANCE TRAINING

by Diane Vives, MS, CSCS,*D, NSCA-CPT,*D

•••••
This article focuses on the profession of a performance trainer. It highlights the environment, the different clientele, and ways to succeed in this profession.

The performance trainer is an evolution of certified National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) professionals that have a passion for sports performance training and training athletes while working in a business or organization not related to a collegiate or professional sports program. This has inspired many professionals to design their business and programs around training general fitness clients with modified performance training philosophies and methods to improve athleticism, overall wellness, and target long-term fitness goals appropriately.

The idea that “everyone is an athlete” brings the passion and goal-oriented mentality of training athletes to the fitness training experience whether your clients are truly targeting sports performance or striving for a higher level of fitness.

This requires the performance trainer to be well versed in both strength and conditioning as well as personal training methodology and skills. By recognizing what the leaders in performance training do to develop their careers, we can create the steps needed to gain the knowledge, skills, and attributes of a successful performance trainer.

PERFORMANCE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT

Immediately when you walk into a facility that is designed specifically for the performance trainer you know that you are ready to experience something usually privy to the sports domain. What began as an innovative shift in focus for facility design in the early 1990s has only become more prevalent with facilities that emerged into the training market such as Parisi Speed School, EXOS, Velocity, etc., and have grown to many more independently owned and franchised facilities around the country. As you walk into many of these facilities, you see multiple training surfaces such as track, field turf, indoor



The idea that ‘everyone is an athlete’ brings the passion and goal-oriented mentality of training athletes to the fitness training experience whether your clients are truly targeting sports performance or striving for a higher level of fitness.

sport court, and multipurpose plyometric flooring. This gives the performance trainer the ability to cross-train with an athlete's sport-specific needs for development in mind. Part of the daily philosophy is the integration of training philosophies specific for training attributes such as speed, agility, power, functional strength, conditioning, and resistance to injury that is evident by the multipurpose open space and versatile equipment that make up the core offering for this type of training environment. As part of the formula for success, many of these facilities integrate the traditional foundations in strength and conditioning that research has proven to be successful in the development of strength and power for performance enhancement.

Several of these facilities create partnerships with sports medicine professionals in order to provide a complete performance training loop which combines the efforts of professionals each within their scopes of practice to offer the most direct and successful path to return to play or activity after an injury. As part of this performance focused environment, services may include performance nutrition and nutrition education that is lead by a registered dietician to address the individual needs of athletes and clients to improve adaptation, recovery, and overall health. This approach to creating training environments enriches the athlete's or client's experience and creates an opportunity for a longer, more successful sports career or focused fitness lifestyle.

In the fitness industry, the performance trainer may also be part of a larger fitness training facility such as the so called "big box gyms" that gives them a unique opportunity. Many of these membership-driven facilities offer exposure to large numbers of potential clients or groups. As a performance trainer, you offer specific services that enhance the overall offering of the training team. Many large fitness chains have restructured the training floor layout, design, and equipment to allow the performance trainer to be successful, therefore adding to the service offering and needs that exist in these facilities focused on local community support. This is also evident in group training and small group training that contain the programming attributes of performance training while successfully providing expanded options and excitement in these environments.

PERFORMANCE TRAINER FOR THE ATHLETE

The first priority of a performance trainer who is working with athletes is to implement a comprehensive, purpose-driven, and ethically supported performance enhancing training experience for all ages and levels. **Many of these athletes are seeking a performance trainer to provide a competitive edge.** Targeting sport-specific goals has taken on many facets within an athlete's world for advancing their careers in sport and pursuing the journey to be their best. Being recruited by a select level sports league, making the varsity team in high school, being scouted for college

scholarships, and making it to the professional sports level are high priority goals and serve as motivation for some of the athletes seeking the services of a performance trainer.

For this reason, the performance trainer increases the opportunity for success by being proficient at needs analysis and profiling as well as being prepared to implement sport-specific programming. For today's fitness professional, this entails having a purpose-driven approach that includes, but is not limited to, knowledge and skills such as functional movement screens, physical capacity testing, progressive program planning, multiple disciplines of practical training applications, performance nutrition guidance, and monitoring recovery. Combining these training methods into a well-rounded training approach allows the athlete to increase their adaptability to higher levels of physical training as well as advance sport-specific development in skills training. Next, the priority for the performance trainer becomes creating durability and longevity within the sports career of

Examples of Knowledge and Applications Used By Performance Trainers working with Athletes

- **NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR SPORT OR ACTIVITY MOVEMENT PROFILE** | Ex: screens, movement assessment, on-going observation
- **PHYSICAL CAPACITY TESTING** | Ex: speed tests, jump tests, strength tests, agility tests
- **PROGRAM PLANNING** | Ex: resistance training, energy system training, speed training, power training, multidirectional skills
- **EXERCISE SELECTION AND TRAINING APPLICATIONS**
- **MONITORING RECOVERY** | Ex: overtraining symptoms, ability to recover
- **PROVIDE NUTRITION EDUCATION AND GUIDANCE**
- **MAINTAINING TRAINING LOGS AND REPORTING SYSTEMS**
- **KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO ACCESS RESEARCH AND RESOURCES FOR SPORT-SPECIFIC PROGRAM PLANNING**
- **COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND EDUCATION FOR THE ATHLETES**

the athlete. When an athlete reaches a pinnacle benchmark based on the level of opportunities given within their particular sport, the focus becomes maintaining their level of performance and resisting injury that could affect or shorten their sports career. The performance trainer must use tools and strategies to maintain a consistent flow of feedback and communication. This is where consistent operating procedures and methods will allow you to have systems in place that rescreen, retest, collect feedback on sports performance, and make you aware of recovery concerns. Using this valuable information to make

appropriate adjustments in your training applications will create confidence with your athletes and offer the best opportunity for long-term success based on their goals and sport.

PERFORMANCE TRAINER FOR GENERAL FITNESS CLIENTS

The attributes of athletes appeal to many clients of the general fitness population who have been athletes in the past, who are seeking a new training challenge, or who possibly want to gain a competitive edge in all areas of life. Examples of the athletic mindset applied to fitness clients:

- Pushing past the point of uncertainty and doubt of what we can achieve mentally and physically
- Training when your body and mind are tired by tapping into a deeper motivation and commitment
- Setting goals that challenge in ways not imagined and battle the fear of failure
- Dealing with the obstacles of daily living and maintaining a consistent training schedule to achieve results
- Willingness to be coached and fully engage in the training program



For these types of clients, fitness training becomes their sport.

It is with these attributes that the performance trainer can wake up the inner athlete within their fitness clients to increase the interest and commitment level. Even if the client does not play any particular sport, they approach their own fitness goals with increased focus and attention.

For a performance trainer who is training fitness athletes, it is important to apply the training applications with the ability to modify and progress appropriately. This requires tools and strategies to maintain open communication and feedback. This awareness is very valuable in ensuring the performance trainer is able to apply proper progression, increase opportunities for client education, and evaluate the success of the program regularly for needed modification or changes.

The challenge of training “like an athlete” will many times ignite a fitness community within your training environment that creates a social connection, encourages taking on new fitness challenges, motivates to enter recreational sporting events, and increases opportunities for creating training

groups and fitness teams to prepare for local competitions or events. For the performance trainer all of these have a positive impact on client motivation, retention, and overall success in personal training and small group training.

PERFORMANCE TRAINER FOR YOUTH

Examples of Knowledge and Applications Used By Performance Trainers working with Youth Athletes (6 – 18 years old)

- **IDENTIFYING BIOLOGICAL AGE, STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT, AND APPLICATION OF ATHLETIC MODEL INDICATORS**
- **BUILDING FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT SKILLS ABCs** (*Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed*), *RJT (Running, Jumping, Throwing)*, *KGBs (Kinesthetics, Gliding, Buoyancy, Striking with a body part)*, *CKs (Catching, Kicking, Striking with an implement)*
- **CREATING AN AGE-APPROPRIATE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT FOR A POSITIVE AND FUN TRAINING EXPERIENCE** (*game play-young, focus and structure-adolescents*)
- **YOUTH RESISTANCE TRAINING APPLICATIONS AND PROGRESSIONS BASED BIOLOGICAL AGE**
- **UNDERSTANDING OF INJURY RISK DURING DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES** (*ex: traction injuries, increased risk in adolescent females*)
- **APPROPRIATE SPEED DEVELOPMENT BASED ON CRITICAL PERIODS OF BIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADAPTATION**
- **TEACHING SUCCESSFUL TRAINING PRACTICES AND PURPOSE BEHIND TRAINING COMPONENTS FOR ADOLESCENTS**
- **IDENTIFYING WHEN TO BEGIN SPORT-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT**
- **NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR PERFORMANCE AND OVERALL HEALTH**
- **ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS AND GUARDIANS**

ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

In the fitness industry today, many factors lead young athletes and their parents to seek out a performance trainer’s services. Some of these factors are the lack of time dedicated to physical education programs in today’s schools, sport-specific aspirations, identified deficiencies in performance compared to peers, or an attempt to get an early competitive edge for long-term athletic goals. This is a great opportunity for the performance trainer to educate and train young athletes with a safe, comprehensive program to prepare young athletes for success and hopefully a long-term career in sports and active lifestyles.

With the right education on youth training, understanding of long-term athletic development, positive coaching techniques, and attention to detail for progression, the performance trainer can create a pathway to long-term success for the youth athlete. This will be accomplished by building a broad foundation for athleticism and guide them to specialization for sport-specific training when it is developmentally appropriate. This is not about training them like adult athletes. Rather, this is using sports science to gain the knowledge and ability to identify the athlete's developmental stages, understand how gender differences play a role during development, and focus on training applications appropriate for the individual athlete.

Building fundamental skills and creating a positive, fun environment that encourages participation is at the core of training young athletes. It has been reported that as high as 70% of youth drop out of sports before the age of 13.



Supporting a young developing athlete as well as educating the parents is a very rewarding role for the performance trainer and increases the opportunities for the young athlete's future and long-term sports career.



PERFORMANCE TRAINER PROFESSIONAL SKILLS & DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION AND RESOURCES

NSCA Texts, NSCA Recommended Resources and Online Learning Resources

Higher Education (For NSCA CSCS)

Seek Mentorships and Internships in a Performance Training Environment

PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY (CERTIFICATION)

NSCA-CPT

CSCS

Additional skill-based and training application certification and experience from other organizations

COMMITMENT TO LIFE-LONG LEARNING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

NSCA Membership to access up-to-date information

Join Special Interest Groups targeting athletes and sports performance

Join organizations that support new knowledge, skills and abilities

Attend conferences, hands-on learning and online education

Invest 10% of your income to professional development every year

BUSINESS SKILLS, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

Proficiency in business administration and accounting

Develop standard operating procedures

Knowledge of sales and marketing strategies

Create a network of inspired professionals locally and nationally

Get involved in your local athletic and fitness community

Create social networking strategy, calendar and action plan

PRACTICE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Set personal goals for self development and personal challenges

Create a “hit list” of identified efficiencies personally and professionally, then take action on them one at a time

Practice what you preach daily (health, physical fitness, nutrition, recovery)

Identify fears and obstacles you face, then take one new action per week that directly affects something on your list

Picture who you want to be and join 3 groups that surround yourself with people and activities that support that

BUILDING SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A career as a performance trainer is built on a progressive educational foundation and dedication to professional development. As a performance trainer, you identify your passion for working with sports and fitness athletes and then carry out the mission to make the athlete's experience better, regardless of age or level of performance. To prepare for success as a performance trainer, the above table outlines some of the professional components suggested.

The performance trainer is unique in that there exists a need to build their educational foundation and proficiencies in both strength and conditioning, as well as in personal training. This author recommends becoming certified with both the NSCA-Certified Personal Trainer® (NSCA-CPT®)

and Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) certifications. Next, seek out internship and mentorship opportunities that provide hands-on learning experiences and begin developing professional relationships and resources. There are many programs offered for the newly emerging performance trainer as well as mentorships to support professional growth throughout your career. It is important in today's competitive professional environment that you create a strong foundation and gain the professional competitive edge.

Often overlooked is the importance of making the commitment to attend live conferences and educational events due to a busy work schedule. The rate of return on investment in your education, building professional networks for future career opportunities, and staying current in the industry far outweighs the cost of the time



and money spent. That is why it is recommended to budget 10% of the revenue made on education, professional development, and business development skills.

As a performance trainer, complete an honest evaluation of knowledge, skills, and abilities (ask a mentor or seasoned professional for assistance) to identify areas for improvement. Then create a continuing education plan to have a direct and positive impact on your career. That is truly the mark of a professional with a long-term vision and career in mind. Consistent, open, and deliberate lines of communication between ownership, management, the performance trainer, and customers plant the seeds for support, validation, and encouragement for this type of ongoing career development.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of the performance trainer's career is the ability to work with athletes and fitness enthusiasts that are obsessed with being their best. In addition, the performance trainer not only understands the impact that performance training delivers but also dedicates their training career to making this possible. Through their own pursuit to be their best, the performance trainer has unlimited opportunities and resources to develop a long, successful career. With a clear plan, professional networking, and the support of organizations like the NSCA, the professional career of a performance trainer proves to be profitable and rewarding.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Vives is Owner and Director of Vives Training Systems and Fit4Austin in Austin, TX. She is an internationally recognized presenter who focuses on providing integration strategies based on science and experience. Currently

she contributes to the Functional Movement Systems team and serves on the Under Armour Performance Training Council. She has served on the Board of Directors for the National Strength and Conditioning Association. She currently serves as a mentor and educator on her website (dianevives.com) and authored the SMART sets DVD series and Training the Female Athlete DVD and ebook series.

BECOMING A CERTIFIED PERSONAL TRAINER (CPT) FROM THE GROUND UP

by Robert Linkul, MS, CSCS,*D, NSCA-CPT,*D, RCPT*D



This article provides direction on how to become a personal trainer. Robert Linkul covers topics such as obtaining a personal trainer certification, personal trainer jobs, and personal trainer insurance.

Article Highlights:

- This article provides a step-by-step guide to becoming a certified personal trainer.
- Pursue certification—learn about the different options, purchase the correct study materials, and establish a study schedule.
- Sign up for the NSCA's personal trainer insurance membership, known as Certified Professional with Liability Insurance (CPI).
- Find a position where you can participate in professional observation; then find an internship or mentorship to gain hands-on experience.
- Network! And begin your job search—the NSCA's Job Board is a great resource for this.

FINDING YOUR INTEREST

The fitness industry is a rewarding profession full of some exceptionally talented individuals. It is the purpose of this article to provide you a blueprint for your professional growth as a certified personal trainer. You will join a group of exceptionally talented individuals that positively affects the lives of clients. This article will take you through each step from finishing high school and becoming certified to growing a successful career training a clientele full of “lifers.”

CERTIFICATION

The National Strength and Conditioning Association-Certified Personal Trainer® (NSCA-CPT®) exam requires the candidate be 18 years of age or older, have a high school diploma or equivalent, and a current cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Certification. A degree in kinesiology (human movement) or a related field (exercise science, exercise physiology, physical therapy, strength and conditioning, physical education, athletic training, etc.) is a preferred resource to pursue and obtain, however; it is not required to register for and take the NSCA-CPT® exam.

The tools that you will acquire from pursuing higher-level education will be extremely beneficial when working with clients of all backgrounds, and specifically the special populations (i.e., adolescents, older adults, pregnant clients, and clients with a disability or disease).

The NSCA Certified Special Population Specialist® (CSPS®) is a next-level certification and is ideal for the career driven Certified Personal Trainer, as the study materials will take you deep inside each of the four special population categories. Special populations make up more than half of the average CPT's clientele.

GETTING CERTIFIED

This is great news. You have made the decision to schedule, study for and take, your NSCA-CPT® exam. It is now time to purchase your study materials.

With your study materials in hand, you should establish a study schedule that will include time for text reading, note taking, practice exams, online education and, if available, participation with a study group and/or review session.

PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY INSURANCE

As an NSCA career-oriented CPT, you should uphold the highest level of professionalism, and to assist you in doing so you can **upgrade your Professional Membership to a Certified Professional with Liability Insurance Membership**. Many companies in the fitness industry provide professional liability insurance; however, as an NSCA Member you receive a discount when purchasing your insurance through the NSCA. Professional liability insurance is not required for employment (as an employee) or for self-employment (as an independent contractor) in every state; however, obtaining professional liability insurance is a proactive step toward protecting yourself. Most professional liability insurance policies cover you while acting as a CPT anywhere you provide service.

Coverage is limited to NSCA Certified Professional Members acting in the capacity of a CSCS®, CSPS®, NSCA-CPT® or Tactical Strength and Conditioning Facilitator® (TSAC-F®). If at any time NSCA certification lapses, liability coverage will cease.

OBSERVATIONS

As an NSCA-CPT®, you are now ready to seek employment. The first step in seeking employment is to secure and participate in professional observations. Professional observations are an effective way to gain “real-life”

experience and learn from established CPTs in the fitness industry. The industry has many areas of expertise (focus) in which you can choose. Use your observation experience(s) as an opportunity to learn about any fitness-related area of interest. Observations can range from a few hours to a few days, and typically do not allow “hands-on” experience working with actual clients. Professional observations can often lead to internships.

INTERNSHIP/MENTORSHIP

As an insured, certified personal trainer with observation hours under your belt, it is now time to seek out “hands-on” experience working with clients within the CPT’s scope of practice (professional guidelines). To accomplish this goal an internship/mentorship is a tool that can be used to provide educational credits and practical experience working with clients.

Areas of Industry Expertise: *Olympic lifting, bodybuilding, power lifting, fat loss/weight management, nutrition, sports*



Successfully working with special populations is a great way to separate yourself in your facility and in the industry as an expert.



performance (sports-specific), High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), suspension training, bodyweight training, strength training, core and posture development, special populations, endurance training, strongman training, strength and conditioning, youth development, corrective exercise and functional movement.

Internships/mentorships can last a couple of weeks to a full year depending on the individual or the organization offering the internship/mentorship and monitor the required hours. Every organization that offers an internship/mentorship will require different duties/responsibilities of the participant, and decide if the position is a paid position.

Remember, you are seeking experience at this point in your career, as you should not shy away from a good internship/mentorship if it is not a paid position. As an intern/mentee, you will typically be privileged to inner-company operations in which you will be exposed and/or educated on how the business side of the industry operates.

Internships/mentorships can include education on program design, assessment techniques, facility management, career development, portfolio development, marketing, sales, etc. The competence of each intern/mentee varies.

Some individuals will be allowed to lead general warm-ups or stretching sessions, create basic workouts, shadow the experienced trainers, maintain the fitness facility/equipment, and perform gym orientations all under the head personal trainer's/fitness director's observation. A successful internship/mentorship is an educational experience and a professional networking opportunity in which a permanent employment position could be offered.

NETWORKING

Certified personal trainers are a small subculture within the close-knit community of the fitness industry. Networking is a great way to grow and develop your career as an insured NSCA-CPT in that it can provide many fitness-based opportunities.

Networking Benefits: *career development (upper management), business partnerships, speaking/presenting opportunities, educational experiences (internships/mentorships), authoring or publishing opportunities, professional development (marketing, sales business), job opportunities (entry-level).*

Networking occurs in many forms including social media; however, the most common is at industry gatherings such as conferences, clinics, and events. Networking within the fitness industry can provide many great things.

Networking within the fitness industry is a vital part to your success in that it aids you in creating a circle of professionals around you. Your circle of fitness professionals should be a group of successfully like-minded individuals that can share knowledge with each other and not feel threatened to lose business.

FINDING A JOB

Now you have experience and you're insured. It is now time to find a part-time or full-time job. In many cases, a part-time job will grow into a full-time position so do not shy away from part-time listings when on the search. I use the term "job" because, as an entry-level trainer, you are still in the early stages of developing a successful and long lasting "career." A job is an opportunity to gain more experience, continue your education, and build solid relationships with both your clients and with other professionals. Not to mention, you can now start to earn a decent living.

As a member of the NSCA, you have access to a database of job openings that are listed on the "Job Board" on the NSCA website. Once you have searched over the database and have selected an opening that you would like to apply for, remember to include a cover letter/letter of interest and your résumé. Listed below are some criteria that can be included in your résumé.

After your application has been processed, you will receive a communication informing you if you have been selected for the next level of application, or not. Typically, an interview will follow in which you should supply a portfolio highlighting your skills and accomplishments. After the interviews, you will be informed if you have been selected for the position. If so, you will typically be drug screened, processed into payroll (paperwork), and given an official orientation to the company/facility.



The fitness professional that does not keep up with the fitness industry will watch the industry pass them.

✓ RÉSUMÉ COMPONENTS

- Objective
- Education
- Certification(s)
- Experience
- Accomplishments/Awards
- Future Objectives (Goals)
- Personal Interests
- Short Biography
- Speaking Engagements
- Authored Materials
- References

NEXT LEVEL CERTIFICATION AND CONFERENCES

Congratulations, you are officially an insured and employed NSCA-CPT. The groundwork has been laid and now it is time to educate and progress to the next level. There are many certifications and continued education organizations in our industry in which you can choose from to take your professional skills and knowledge to the next level. Obtaining another certification or attending conferences are not mandatory (except to maintain and renew your NSCA certification every three years), however, the fitness industry is one of the fastest growing professions in the United States in terms of research and development and employment.

Health and fitness conferences feature the brightest and most educated professionals in the field. Research studies, practical application, business, career development, nutrition, sports performance, etc. are some of the many featured areas covered at these conferences. Conferences also afford you networking opportunities, job board postings, discounted equipment, discounted educational materials (study materials), special interest group (SIG) meetings, keynote speakers, exhibit halls, and much more. Below are some of the fitness industry's continued education certifications and conferences in which you can choose to pursue or attend.

ADDITIONAL CREDENTIALS

- Certified Special Population Specialist® (CSPS®)
- Tactical Strength and Conditioning Facilitator® (TSAC-F®)
- Functional Movement Screen (FMS)
- USA Weightlifting (USAW)
- Corrective Exercise Specialist (CES)
- Total Body Resistance Exercise (TRX)
- Russian Kettlebell Challenge (RKC)
- C.H.E.K. Institute (Specialist)

INDUSTRY EVENTS

- NSCA Personal Trainers Conference*
- NSCA National Conference*
- Perform Better Three Day Summit
- Perform Better Learn-by-Doing
- ACSM Health and Fitness Summit and Exposition
- ACE (East and West)
- IHRSA International Conference
- IDEA Personal Trainer (East and West)
- NASM Personal Training Workshop

**NSCA Event Offering Member Registration Discount*

START YOUR CAREER AND PURSUE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/ADVANCEMENT

You are an employed, continually educated, insured NSCA-CPT who is now ready to make the transition from performing the entry-level duties of a “job” and pursue a full-time position and the professional responsibilities of a “career.” You have taken the right steps toward becoming an expert in your field of focus (specialty) and are developing a reputation in which others are seeking you out for guidance. Many CPTs make the mistake of feeling as if they have “arrived,” meaning that they can back off the desire for improvement or stop pursuing the continued education that they should be. At this point in your “career” I urge you to push harder. This is the time for even more professional growth as it leads to a higher income and inner company advancement.

You are now an insured NSCA-Certified Personal Trainer that has developed a reputable and respectable career within the ever-growing and ever-changing fitness profession. It is now your responsibility to uphold that level of professionalism by maintaining your professional insurance, working within your scope of practice, earning your CEUs, and renewing your certification at the end of every three-year recertification cycle. Our profession is only as good as the professionals that contribute to it. We strongly urge you to uphold your level of professionalism and in doing so continue to work toward becoming an industry leader.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Linkul is the National Strength and Conditioning Association's (NSCA) 2012 Personal Trainer of the Year and is a volunteer with the NSCA as their Southwest Regional Coordinator and Committee Chairman for the Personal

Trainers Special Interest Group (SIG). Linkul has written for a number of fitness publications including Personal Fitness Professional, Healthy Living Magazine, OnFitness Magazine, and the NSCA's Performance Training Journal (PTJ) and Personal Training Quarterly (PTQ). Linkul is an international continued education presenter within the fitness industry and a Career Development Instructor for the National Personal Training Institute (NPTI).

BECOMING A SPECIAL POPULATIONS PERSONAL TRAINER

by Cindy Kugler, MS, CSCS, CSPS

•••••
In this article, developing personal training skills to train special populations is discussed; it includes starting out as a novice through the expert level.

Due to many factors, primarily characterized by the increase in non-communicable diseases and healthcare costs that need to be contained, we are now in a healthcare revolution. A National Strength and Conditioning Association-Certified Personal Trainer® (NSCA-CPT®), with a focus in special populations, will be seen as a healthcare extender, providing collaboration between healthcare providers and the needs of those with temporary and chronic diseases or conditions.

It will be necessary for personal trainers to develop attributes that prepare them to work with special populations effectively and safely, in addition to the public and healthcare systems. The NSCA has stated that the Certified Special Populations Specialist® (CSPS®) certification encompasses what it entails to be competent in working with these clients.

The NSCA states, “CSPSs are fitness professionals who, using an individualized approach, assess, motivate, educate, and train special population clients of all ages, regarding their health and fitness needs, preventively, and in collaboration with healthcare professionals. Special populations include those with chronic and temporary health conditions. CSPSs design safe and effective exercise programs, provide guidance to help

clients achieve their personal health/fitness goals, and recognize and respond to emergency situations. Recognizing their own areas of expertise, CSPSs receive referrals from and refer clients to other healthcare providers as appropriate.”

To become truly competent at the highest level working with special populations it takes time, planning, and a lifelong education in advancing through several stages of professional development (see Figure 1). The keys to professional development beyond initial training also include integration of management/operations and leadership. As an aspiring personal trainer, the evolution of becoming an expert/advanced practice in working with special populations takes multiple steps.



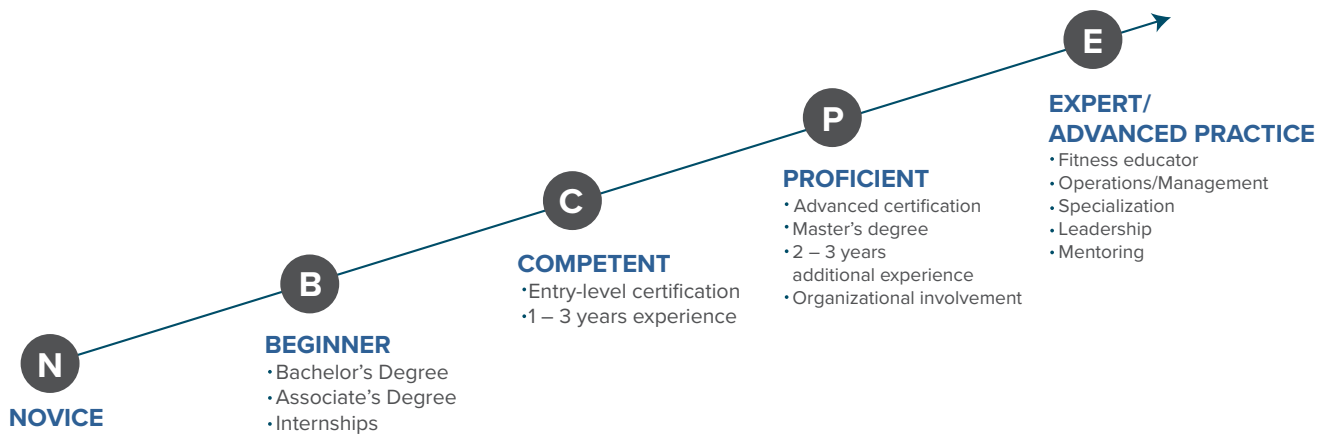


Figure 1.

NOVICE/BEGINNER

Initially, the novice to beginner personal trainer starts with obtaining basic knowledge, skills, and abilities. By obtaining an Associate's or Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science, the base sciences of anatomy, physiology, kinesiology, and exercise physiology will be learned in conjunction with the fundamentals of exercise programming/prescription and exercise techniques. **At this stage of development, the novice trainer gains experience primarily with healthy populations through lab opportunities, internships, shadow/clinical experiences, and personal experiences.**

At the novice to beginner stages, the trainer should be looking to obtain an accredited entry-level certification such as the NSCA-CPT. Also, becoming a member of the NSCA will allow for ongoing access to the most current and useful information, as well as tools for education and professional development.

COMPETENT

The next stage of advancement is to become a competent personal trainer working with a broader population base. This usually takes place over the next one to three years of a professional's career development. Advancement involves expanding their knowledge-base to include more in-depth pathophysiology by earning a Master's degree in Exercise Science, as well as gaining continued experience from internships/observations in club, corporate, private studio, and rehabilitation settings. Attending conferences, workshops, and acquiring in-depth information from the experts in the field can greatly enhance continued growth.

Additionally, a competent trainer should become skilled in advanced assessment, risk assessment, coaching and behavior change, advanced and varied exercise techniques, and exercise prescription/guidelines for special populations.



Additionally, a competent trainer should become skilled in advanced assessment, risk assessment, coaching and behavior change, advanced and varied exercise techniques, and exercise prescription/guidelines for special populations.

Coaching and behavior change knowledge and skills are very valuable in increasing success as a personal trainer. Understanding the psychology of chronic illness and utilizing those skills to increase a client's long-term success is important. Developing strengths in being able to read clients so that the best methods, equipment, and progression are used will lead to better individualization, increased client outcomes, and satisfaction. Knowledge and practice in the stages of change and motivational interviewing allow personal trainers to move beyond being a cheerleader and exercise routine creator.

Instead, personal trainers lead their clients toward lifelong health. Paying attention to the details of your clients' programs, asking yourself why you developed each step of the program and keeping the big picture in mind at the same time are characteristics that need to be developed and mastered. The skills of exercise programming are the basis of client results. The skills of relationship building to keep clients coming back is the basis of client success and personal trainer growth, both professionally and financially.

PROFICIENT

A specialization may begin to develop that is dependent upon the personal trainer's experiences, opportunities, knowledge, interests, and work settings. Specialization may occur in areas that include orthopedic conditions, cardiac, pulmonary, cancer, obesity, diabetes, Multiple Sclerosis, age groups, pregnancy, or any combination. The more experienced competent trainer will continue to improve their knowledge and skill to become a proficient trainer by obtaining an advanced certification (e.g., CSPS) that not only validates their competencies, but also assures the public of the quality the trainer can provide. Continued membership and increased attendance and involvement in state/regional and national organizations will also assist in career development.

Now that a strong base in career development has been formed, over the next three to five years continued development toward the stage of proficient and then to expert/advance practice can become the focus. Becoming an expert/advance practice trainer includes refining knowledge and skills in business acumen, special populations, working with people, coaching, behavior change, and leadership. Staying current in guidelines, techniques and pathophysiology is a lifelong developmental practice. Longevity and professional development in a personal training career requires lifelong learning, while keeping interested and energized in the type of clients with which you are working.

EXPERT

As an expert/advanced practice professional, business skills and operational/management skills should be included in career development. These skills will be beneficial in understanding the needs and growth of the business you work for, as well as in managing your own personal training business. Operation/management skills include budgeting, capital expenditures, costing out services and programs, staffing skills, training/orientation, human resource knowledge, interviewing and understanding marketing concepts that promote your strengths and/or the facility strengths.

Gaining these skills occurs not only through experiences, but may also be enhanced through additional education via online courses, community colleges, business certificate programs and/or degree programs. Additionally, you must have knowledge and awareness of liability aspects. Keeping abreast of the latest guidelines for facility safety,

emergency preparation, exercise guidelines and technique, public health, and specific conditions organizations not only increases effective programming of clients but decreases chances of legal complications.

As an expert/advanced practice trainer you may also choose to become a specialist in education leading seminars or continuing education workshops. Working as an educator of other trainers that deal with special populations will require enhanced skills that include working with large groups, education programming, group dynamics, and curriculum development. Using your expertise in special populations in operations/management, or as an education specialist, will assist in creating additional qualified professionals.

Alternative industry opportunities for personal trainers that specialize in special populations include corporate wellness, clinical research coordinator, medical industry representatives, and clinical engineers. The knowledge-base in working with special populations fits well with the various health issues found among employees. Additional specific experiences and education needed in corporate wellness may include areas of health risk analysis, employee needs analysis, and business aspects, such as budgeting.



Access resources and utilize forms to track business processes and expenditures.

Clinical research coordinators and engineers can work in private clinics, for pharmaceutical corporations, or device companies. These positions coordinate or support research studies by collection, compilation, documentation, and analysis of the research data; or support those doing the above with training.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Identifying and seeking opportunities to develop your skills is important in advancing your practice. Asking your supervisor, and knowing the mission of the organization you are working for, will assist in your growth. Developing skills and submitting program proposals that meet the needs of the organization increases your opportunities for promotion and/or leadership. Other opportunities may exist in special populations by increasing awareness of strategic initiatives of the local health department, physician practices, medical center specialties, or nationally. If other opportunities you discover meet your interests and expertise, creating programming to assist in meeting those needs serves to increase your practice and visibility.

When working with other entities developing knowledge about their functions, learning to speak their language will be important in presenting your ideas and programming to gain their support and recommendation. Becoming involved in community committees and utilizing networking opportunities and skills also increases exposure. Seeking out shadow experiences in physician offices and with management in medical centers aids in a better understanding of their workings and will assist in understanding their challenges and how a personal trainer can best work with them. In working with other entities, communicating results and outcomes will be important. Obtaining knowledge in how, when, and in what method they prefer to receive feedback will be needed. When working with physicians, sending status reports and communicating in an agreed upon frequency, method, and manner will need to be developed.



Successful personal trainers are willing to take on jobs and tasks that are needed. They go above and beyond the basic job description, seek out and find opportunities to help clients, the organization they work for, and the community they live in.

Create a Progress and Goal Identification sheet to assess the patient's/client's risk factors and communicate back to the healthcare professional with an SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment and Recommendation) form or chart. Providing information that is beneficial, readily accessed, and easily read will ensure and increase confidence in your knowledge, skills, abilities, and increase referrals. Create a form to gather personal training feedback from clients. Obtaining client satisfaction results are also beneficial in overall outcome reporting and marketing.

Other aspects of leadership as an expert trainer include increased involvement in state, regional, and national organizations through presentations and involvement in committees to enhance the field of exercise, fitness, and wellness. Ongoing mentoring and networking through work or organizational opportunities will assist in meeting your professional goals and in advancing your career, while also assisting less experienced trainers in reaching their goals. This may also include being active in your community by submitting articles to local newspapers, business journals, radio, and TV appearances.

When looking at personal training of special populations as a career choice, there are several avenues to advance and develop a career. Whether choosing to work with clients at risk for chronic disease, assisting those in decreasing morbidity and mortality for those with existing conditions, and/or assisting those in decreasing unnecessary health events, many opportunities exist for the evolving special population personal trainer. Working with special populations presents opportunities for specialization that can secure advancement, longevity, and enjoyment in your chosen profession. **As the aging population increases, special population needs expand, and healthcare changes are made, the need for qualified and certified professionals will continue to grow.** With the large amount of opportunities that currently exist, now is the time to take the initiative to plan for your future.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cindy Kugler is currently employed at Bryan Health in Lincoln, NE. She has worked as an exercise specialist for cardiac/pulmonary rehabilitation, department manager, and is currently the LifePointe Clinical Liaison. Kugler

has assisted with lifestyle modification for those with chronic disease and worksite health promotion for Bryan Health and other organizations. She obtained her Master of Science degree in Exercise Physiology from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. Currently, she is the Chair of the Certified Special Populations Specialist® (CSPS®) certification committee.

GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE TSAC DOOR

Paul Riordan, MS, CSCS

• • • • •
An seasoned tactical strength and conditioning (TSAC) coach candidly reveals the unique challenges and opportunities within a rapidly evolving field

When I hear from young strength and conditioning professionals about how “cool” it must be to be a tactical strength coach, I can tell they have been watching too many television shows about Wildland Firefighters, U.S. Navy Seals, or SWAT Teams. They fantasize about how great it must be to teach big-bearded, iron-fisted, door-kicking operators how to perform Olympic lifts or condition with kettlebells. The reality for young professionals is that even getting a foot in the door is incredibly challenging. However, opportunities exist for those with an unyielding perseverance to support the tactical community, strong credentialing, connections within the field, and a basic understanding of the environment, which can lead to a rewarding career.

Before the creation of the Tactical Strength and Conditioning (TSAC) program, before any National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) credentialing existed, physical fitness was a core component of military, police, and fire training programs, and there were instructors to teach it. Many of TSAC’s biggest proponents, including the previous and current TSAC Program Managers, have served or continue to serve in the military and first responder communities. This continues to be a clear avenue to enter the tactical strength and conditioning field because their experience brings an in-depth

understanding of the demands of the job. A much more novel idea is that an outsider, a civilian strength and conditioning professional, could apply his or her expertise to this world.

OPPORTUNITIES: INDUSTRY LEADERS

The tactical environment is filled with curious athletes, individuals who want to do more, and do it better. That desire for knowledge opens the door for outsiders, such as strength and conditioning professionals, to get in. There are many instances of representatives from tactical groups seeking out sports performance organizations, established collegiate strength and conditioning programs, professional sports teams, and scientific research organizations, all with the intent to learn from the best. I was lucky enough to take advantage of this when I was an intern at the NSCA’s Performance Center.

While at the NSCA, I was introduced to two active-duty service members who were there for one week of training in the TSAC program. I did not know it at the time, but they were in charge of their groups’ training and continuing education, and were also trying to recruit strength coaches for their group. Most of my fellow interns and supervisors from the NSCA at the time went on to take career positions within tactical settings. The NSCA is not alone, the U.S. Olympic Training Centers, colleges, universities, professional sports,

and private sports performance companies account for the large majority of the hiring pool for tactical groups. So the first and most common door to get in is to be a leader in your field, or like myself, at least be an intern for those leading experts.

OPPORTUNITIES: SELF-MADE POSITIONS

If you are not an industry leading professional, there is one very important key that will unlock the door to this community—persistence. One common theme among seasoned professionals is that they clawed and scraped their way to get to be leaders in this field. Whether you pursue a more traditional route through athletics or begin to grow into the tactical community early in your career, at some point you have to grind and hustle to build your skillset or establish your connection into the network that will give you your first job.

After undergraduate school, I volunteered at a physical therapy clinic and learned that the big insurance game was not for me. I worked part-time at a sports performance center which taught me that I did not have the patience to work with teenagers. I did administrative work for a sports psychologist, where I learned I needed to be physically active rather than sit in a chair all day. My graduate school provided me the opportunity to move to Colorado and intern at NSCA headquarters. The NSCA internship gave me a connection to a U.S. military group, who I stayed in contact with until they eventually hired me for six hours per week. I got up at 4 a.m. daily, hustled, and stayed after hours. That hard work paid off in an escalation to

12 hours a week, then 20 hours per week and multiple recommendations to a contacting representative, and finally my first full-time, salaried with benefits, tactical strength and conditioning job.

The following are examples of current civilian strength and conditioning professionals in tactical populations that have similar stories of persistence. One of the pioneers of human performance within the U.S. military, a researcher who 40 years ago had no opportunities for human performance within the U.S. military, began a post-doctoral fellowship at Uniformed Services University. She worked diligently to secure grants, publish research, and promote herself, her ideas, and her work. Rather than hide behind the lab coat, she put on the combat boots, ran on the beach with Navy Seals, and performed data collection throughout the day and night during Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training.

An exercise physiology professor's interest in martial arts grew to an obsession that motivated him to open a martial arts training academy near three major military bases. While teaching at the academy he rolled and sprawled with active-duty military training coordinators and unit leaders, who consequently created new positions and sought funding for new programs to train service members on combative techniques. When new positions opened in human performance, this professor was uniquely qualified to fill the role because his reputation and connections had already been established and a full-time government employee position was within his reach.



An athletic trainer volunteered at a fire department, only to get paid in breakfast tacos and thanks. She then created a proposal for full-time employment, called the Fire Chief every day for two weeks, and followed up with an Assistant Chief every month for the next two years before funding finally came together for her current position.

These examples may be unorthodox, but they demonstrate an unyielding dedication and passion to improve lives while creating a niche where it has never existed. Even if you are a highly skilled and self-driven person, you may still find some challenges ahead of you. Do not be overwhelmed. It should not take a lifetime to get your first tactical job. Despite the highest level of persistence, knowledge of the preferred qualifications for these positions cannot be overlooked.

OPPORTUNITIES: BEGINNING QUALIFICATIONS

As a tactical strength and conditioning professional, a Bachelor’s degree within the field is almost always required and a Master’s degree is preferred. Three to five years of experience working with elite athletes (e.g., collegiate, professional, or special military populations) is generally expected. The Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist® (CSCS®) certification is required. Other credentials may be noted, as there is not a unified agreement on the requirements for a tactical strength and conditioning professional. This leads to a lot of variety in job descriptions, but a Bachelor’s degree within a related field, CSCS, and three to five years of experience is a great starting place.

LOGISTICS: CONTRACTS

The majority of the positions available are temporary contracts. The contracting world is volatile; positions come and go, contracts change hands, funding dries up, and lapses in work are common. Every year my contract with the U.S. military had to be renewed and every year the negotiation between the U.S. government and my organization came down to the last week, the last day, or even lapsed over the deadline. I was sent home, unsure about my job security or my next paycheck, only to return the next day with a new contract as if nothing had happened.

One prominent collegiate strength and conditioning coach was recruited for a tactical position, drove to work to give the college athletic director his two-week notice, only to find out later that same day the government contract fell through and he was out of a job. Another coach agreed to travel overseas for a position, packed up their lives, their family, moved out of their home, only to find out that a political disagreement changed visa status to and from the country. They found themselves jobless and homeless for the next six months. Unlike any other strength and conditioning job, contracts in the TSAC community can be stressful and their volatility should be considered before beginning the application process.

LOGISTICS: APPLICATIONS

Whether you apply for a full-time government or contracted position, the application and interview process can be a tough journey. Interviews have been known to take up entire eight-hour days, with mock lectures, interview panels, tours, and informal interview lunches. One coach was required to complete a mock lesson plan, take a group through an hour-long workout, and then perform the group’s fitness test, which included push-up, sit-up, pull-up, agility run, 1.5 mile run, 200 m swim, and timed water treading events.

It is important to maintain a professional appearance, especially with application processes that can, at times, be very frustrating. Some coaches have experienced lost resumes, interviews rescheduled for months later, verbal job offers rescinded, in-person interviews delayed, and no response to any form of communication attempts, even years later. Part of interacting with this community is an ability to maintain professionalism and outlast bureaucracy.

Good interviewing techniques are essential. Proper preparation includes researching the organization or group before you speak to anyone, finding out with whom you will be interviewing and their background, finding someone you can talk to that has worked there before, and learning the common language of the organization. If you do get an in-person interview, take notes and ask relevant questions during the interview. You should dress appropriately, with a business suit or an equivalent, and all clothes should be clean and pressed. If coaching is part of the interview process, bring your nicest gym clothes with you and ask for time to change. Follow up with them and thank them for the opportunity after the interview.

GOVERNING BODIES – JOB BOARDS	JOB SEARCH WEBSITES
NCSA (TSAC Facebook page)	USAJOBS
NATA (Public safety athletic trainers society Facebook page)	Navy MWR
APTA	Civilian Careers
AASP	Indeed, LinkedIn
CPSDA	Simply Hired, Glassdoor

LOGISTICS: SECURITY CLEARANCE

Security clearances are a remarkably common reason a qualified applicant does not get a job within tactical communities. The process usually occurs after a successful interview where your employment may be contingent upon a successful clearance process. In my own professional work experience, I have been the most experienced and qualified applicant. I interviewed and was given a conditional offer of employment, pending my security clearance. After six months of paperwork, interviews, and multiple polygraph examinations, I was told that I was no longer a suitable candidate because of an unknown reason in my background investigation.

Many agencies deal with sensitive information and they need to trust you with that information. The clearance process can be invasive. Depending on the organization with which you are applying you might be required to fill out a Standard Form 86 (for the U.S. Federal Government) or similar document. This form can be found online, but basically contains every place, person, and thing you have done in the past 7 to 10 years of your life. It is helpful to know and have contact information for close family members and friends, current and former neighbors, and recall countries you have visited to include your dates of travel. They will investigate your criminal and financial history. Your debt should be minimal and your minor criminal history should be just that, minor, and in the past. You may need to take a polygraph examination and all your paperwork must match up with the truthful statements you make. Drug tests are also common. Previous minor drug use is rarely an issue, but recent use will likely disqualify you. Even if it is legal for use in your state, it is not acceptable for a U.S. federal government job. Alcohol misuse and abuse can also raise concern for the clearance investigators.

SUMMARY

Strength and conditioning professionals are needed in the tactical community and opportunities for coaching jobs are growing in this field. How and where to go to find these job opportunities continues to be a challenge for young professionals. These positions are not entry level. If you are straight out of undergraduate or graduate school, you should get out and volunteer or intern for a great coach or an established program. It will be important to have a wide scope of experience, and be able to adapt to varying personalities and a wide spectrum of athletic abilities. The famous U.S. baseball player and sports management executive, Branch Rickey once said, "Success is that place in the road where preparation meets opportunity." If you are determined, you can get your foot in the door. If you are prepared, you can ace the interview and earn your first tactical job. Once you are allowed in, you will find a lifelong career of enjoyment and sincere appreciation from some of the most amazing athletes in the world, tactical athletes.

The NSCA does an excellent job at updating current open positions within TSAC, but because of the novelty of



many of these positions it is recommended that you pursue multiple avenues to search for job postings. Please reference the table below for job postings within the tactical strength and conditioning community. (Common search terms may include: strength, fitness, exercise, strength and conditioning, human performance, fitness specialist, and training instructor, just as examples)

RESOURCES

1. Soika, T. So you want to train tactical athletes: Becoming a TSAC-Facilitator. NSCA Career Development Guide, 2013.
2. Sell, K. Developing a Career in TSAC: Profiles of Practitioners. NSCA Career Series, 2015.
3. Favre, M. Becoming a Strength and Conditioning Coach. NSCA Career Series.
4. Krause, M. Becoming a Professional Strength and Conditioning Coach. NSCA Career Series.
5. Series of Tactical Professionals Career Profile Interviews [telephone interviews] (2018, March 21-28).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Riordan is a civilian physical training instructor at the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Academy. Previously, he was a senior physical activity scientist at the Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP) at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS). For the five years prior to his time at CHAMP, he was a strength and conditioning coach working within the Department of Defense. He earned his Master of Science degree in Exercise Science from George Washington University and his Bachelor of Science degree in Physical Education and Psychology at Ohio Wesleyan University.

DEVELOPING A CAREER IN ACADEMIA

by Chad M. Kerksick, PhD, ATC, CSCS,*D, NSCA-CPT,*D

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Are you interested in pursuing a career in strength and conditioning research? Chad Kerksick, Assistant Professor of Exercise Science at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO, provides insight into some of the advantages and disadvantages of a career in academia. Kerksick talks about how to choose a path, and the different types of academic jobs available today.

MY BACKGROUND

My name is Chad Kerksick and I am currently an Assistant Professor of Exercise Science in the Health, Exercise, and Sports Sciences Department at Lindenwood University. I grew up in Lebanon, IL, a small town in southern Illinois with 41 classmates in my school. I first earned a Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science from Truman State University before attending the University of Memphis and earning a Master's degree in Exercise and Sport Science. I then attended Baylor University and earned a PhD in Exercise, Nutrition, and Preventive Health before beginning my first academic appointment at the University of Oklahoma in the Fall of 2006, moving to a position at the University of New Mexico in the Fall of 2012. My research interests center upon studying the impact of exercise and nutritional interventions and how they impact the performance, health, and recovery of healthy, athletic, and clinical populations.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF AN ACADEMIC CAREER IS FOR YOU?

This question is one with no clear answer, as there are no single definitive criteria to consider. If I was forced to state some characteristics that would be good

indicators of whether or not a person is cut out for a career in academics, I would say you first need to love learning and the process that it often requires. Secondly, I would say you need to have a great deal of passion and excitement for your work. This second part is critically important as many parts of writing a thesis or dissertation are tedious and time-consuming, but it can become exciting if you are fascinated with what the process is teaching you along the way. These sentiments extend to observations I have made of many graduate students and faculty colleagues over the years, as many of them operate with a high level of excitement and passion towards their areas of interest.

From a personal perspective, very early on I remember being enamored and excited for the things I studied in my undergraduate program in exercise science. This was something I regularly witnessed on numerous occasions of the many outstanding graduate students I have had the pleasure of working with as a faculty member. Therefore, if you are not sure if an academic job is your calling, a completely non-scientific way of making this determination is to evaluate your level of excitement and passion towards your line of study.



WHAT ARE THE PROS/CONS OF A CAREER IN ACADEMIA?

Like all careers, advantages and disadvantages exist for a career in academics. Ask five different faculty members this question and you are likely to get somewhat different answers. I have identified five advantages that I feel exist for a career in academics. I have listed them below and I will follow with a brief explanation:

- Flexibility with your schedule
- Ability to focus on activities that you find to be interesting
- Stability
- Independence
- Compensation

As a full-time faculty member, you have a great deal of flexibility across the entire year. Each year you may have summers off, you get approximately four weeks surrounding the winter holidays, and most schools have a week off in March. These times off lend themselves nicely to being able to spend time with friends and family and also get other work done. Teaching in the summer is often available and if you decide to do this then you of course would have to manage this responsibility.

The second advantage is a big one to me. For the most part, faculty members end up teaching and researching on topics that they themselves find to be very interesting. When you consider that many people go to work each day and do things they could care less about, it has always been valuable to be able to spend my time doing things I truly enjoy. Overall, academic jobs are stable, as they typically are not jobs where people are hired and fired on a regular basis. This is even more the case after you have earned

tenure. The next advantage, independence, means that you are left to develop the courses you are appointed to teach on your own. In a similar light, faculty members are left to develop their own program of research and scholarly work. Put another way, I do not have a boss that is consistently checking up on me.

The last advantage, compensation, is probably the most surprising, particularly if any person reading this article is a faculty member. Generally speaking, salaries for faculty are low, particularly when you consider most people with PhDs have anywhere from 9 - 10 years of college education. But when you frame the level of compensation with the stability, independence, opportunity to work on things you value, and the amount of time you have off for any given year, I feel the compensation is adequate. Nonetheless, if you get into academics thinking you are going to be wealthy, you will likely be disappointed.

Like many others, a career in academics also has some disadvantages and some of them are listed below:

- Teaching load or scholarly/research expectations
- Service expectations (number of students you must advise and/or committee work)
- Teaching into evenings
- Propensity to bring work home
- Compensation

In my opinion, many of the disadvantages can be managed, particularly if you are able to clearly identify just exactly what type of academic job you want. For example, it could be problematic if you want to spend most of your time teaching because that is what you love, but you take a job that requires you to do more research. Interestingly enough, the exact opposite can be true for other people. Typically teaching in a graduate program requires teaching evening classes and for some that is troubling due to family obligations or other personal interests. Probably the biggest disadvantage or area that I personally struggle with is the propensity to work on things at home. While I feel this struggle largely stems from my passion and excitement for what I teach and research, there is always another paper or quiz to grade, a grant or research paper to write, service to complete, or emails to send. My wife has a job that lends itself nicely to leaving it all at work when she is done for the day, and for me personally this a work in progress. Please understand, however, that this could be as much of an area of personal growth for me as it is a universal struggle across faculty.

Notice that I have also put compensation down as a negative simply because this is probably the number one negative voiced from other faculty. It is all a matter of what you focus on. If you want the larger salary, commissions, and bonuses, then a career in academics may not be for you.

I do not want this last section to come across as sounding like a person who is bitter about their job, rather I hope to offer some of the good and not so good things that many faculty members will struggle with from time to time. Overall, I will say I really enjoy working in academics and the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. It is a rewarding career and one that allows me to continually learn and grow from an intellectual perspective. In particular, the opportunity to interact with students and all of their excitement is inspiring and routinely reminds me why I got into this line of work in the first place. In comparison to other common career pursuits in strength and conditioning, a career in academia can look pretty good (speaking from biased eyes, of course).

WHAT IS THE TYPICAL PATH OF A CAREER IN ACADEMIA?

Many people would say there is no typical path to a career in academia. It is important to understand two things, however: 1) most faculty positions at universities and almost universally for positions that are tenure-track require a PhD and 2) by deciding to get your PhD you are basically saying you want to either teach or conduct research (or a combination of both). Certainly there are exceptions but these two things are mostly true of all situations.

First you must obtain your undergraduate degree and along the way be sure to earn good grades and take as many science-based courses as you can. The decision to move on to graduate education (first your Master's degree and then PhD) is the next step and more thought and decisions need to enter your mind. From my perspective, I feel two major factors should dominate the decision-making process. First, I am a strong advocate that students should do their homework on programs and universities and look very closely (nearly exclusively) at schools that allow you the opportunity to work closely with a faculty member who is already researching things you find to be of interest. I closely followed this advice and I feel this was a major reason I was happy and satisfied through my graduate school experience. Further, to this day, I maintain an excellent relationship with that faculty mentor. I am convinced that students who follow this advice will be happier and more productive (which will please your faculty mentor). Second, going to a graduate program where you can earn an assistantship to pay your tuition and provide a stipend for living expenses should also be strong considerations.

Other important factors should enter your mind when deciding on a graduate program, particularly a PhD program. Examples include "how much teaching experience do I need and how much of that experience will I receive?"

Most academic jobs require you to be a good teacher and as a result, it is usually a good idea to get some teaching experience during your PhD studies. Another example question might be "who will I be working alongside?" Many students have visions of working alongside a widely known faculty member and are disappointed when instead their time is spent working with a laboratory coordinator or other graduate students.

I routinely tell students that your graduate work is largely what you make of it. If you truly do have aspirations to begin a career in academics, then I strongly encourage every student to treat their graduate work like a job. Be professional in how you act and present yourself. Be reliable, work hard, and most importantly be around. So many opportunities to test a new theory, piece of equipment, or learn from a mentor come from being around in the labs or the building where your program resides. Lastly, do not be afraid to work. Every very successful academic professional I have met and interacted with, has worked very hard and was very devoted to their craft.

POST-DOC OR NOT?

Post-doctoral studies seem to be becoming more popular as universities typically expect more and more research productivity from their faculty. Generally speaking, a post-doc would consist of a 2 – 4-year period after receiving your doctorate where you would work closely with a faculty member and further develop your skill set for conducting research. These jobs are typically located at larger institutions in well-populated areas and you end up working with someone who has established themselves as a researching professor. I personally think the best advice about doing a post-doc or not is to closely identify what type of academic job you would like to have (see discussion below) and make a determination if it would be beneficial. Many factors enter into this decision so no one thing can universally be used, but if you desire to hold a job that requires to completely support your research program, all of its personnel, and even a portion of your own salary, it would wise to consider a post-doc.

I will share that I strongly considered doing a post-doc, as advice from faculty members at the time was nearly split down the middle. I know I would have enjoyed it, but when the opportunity came to secure an academic position at a university I would have been happy to receive after a post-doc, I accepted the job instead. Alternatively, a doctoral student who worked with me at my first academic position was an absolute rock star and was more than prepared professionally and emotionally to succeed as a faculty member, but he was steadfast in his desire to do a post-doc. He has since completed that post-doc, learned a great deal, and was offered an excellent job package at a major university in the southeast.

TYPES OF ACADEMIC JOBS

I have referred to this section on multiple occasions. I feel four types of academic jobs exist:

- I | Research-only jobs that require little to no teaching
- II | Jobs that require a good bit of research productivity but also require you to teach one or multiple classes every semester
- III | Jobs that require you to teach multiple classes every semester and have minor research expectations
- IV | Teaching-only jobs that require you to teach 4+ classes every semester but require no research productivity

When mentoring our students, I routinely refer to this breakdown and implore them to think long and hard over what type of job they want. I have even made it a habit to ask students who are thinking about coming to our PhD program what type of job they want. I feel it is critical for people who are considering a career in academics to identify what type of job they want as every job offers its own advantages and disadvantages. For example, level I jobs are commonly referred to as “get funded or get fired” jobs. This means you will typically have next to no teaching expectations (1 – 2 lectures per year) and generous amounts of research equipment and lab space. However, you better bring in external grant funds to support your research program and other programs at your university; if you do not, you will be replaced.

Level II jobs are commonly located at the larger state schools and require people to develop a productive research program, but they also demand you to teach 1 – 2 classes per semester. These jobs are commonly referred to as “publish or perish.”

Level III jobs are often at state-funded schools, but they may be at a smaller or regional state-funded school. These jobs demand that you are committed to being an excellent teacher and many of these jobs are required to develop a modest but functional research program.

Level IV jobs are many times at small colleges or universities. They typically require you to teach four or more classes each semester and in exchange have no research expectations.

From my experiences as a student and faculty member, most students begin to identify early on why they are getting their PhD and nothing could be more important. For students who want to do the highest level of research, you need to find a PhD program that will immerse you in research and position you to compete for the most competitive of post-doctoral positions. Through this path, you will be exposed to the research process and also likely exposed to writing federal grants to fund your research program. Many students want a mixture of both, but are

intimidated at the thought of having to get grants to support their own work. In these situations, students are best served at going to a program that will expose them to research and also give them an opportunity to develop as a teacher. Finally, many students identify early on that they want to teach. These students should be directed more towards teaching opportunities and faculty who are well trained to mentor and enhance their effectiveness as a teacher.

HONING YOUR CRAFT AND MAKING A SCHOLARLY IMPACT

I hope to close by offering two tips that were shared with me from other faculty members. For starters and once you have earned your position, be a good colleague. Be supportive and helpful and if your line of work allows for it (most do); do not be an island unto yourself. Find ways to collaborate and connect with other faculty members. This can go a long way in developing collegiality among faculty, garnering support when you need it, showing how you can engage with others, and it will certainly help to solidify support towards tenure.

Another faculty member recommended to those interested in research to exercise patience with publishing data. His point was to not be so driven to get another publication that you fail to learn how to build upon your existing work and to truly develop a line of productive research. In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that it often takes established faculty members decades of work to garner the reputation they have. In other words, “Rome wasn’t built in a day” and make sure you work to grow and improve each step along the way.

NETWORK/VOLUNTEER

Begin developing your professional identity very early on by attending state and regional clinics and national meetings. This is where membership at the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) has been invaluable to me. Specifically, the NSCA provides a platform for you to present your research at national meetings and volunteer for various committees. The conversations and people you meet in these environments are invaluable. You never know when someone you meet will be the search chair on a position you hope to earn or be a collaborating colleague on your next research study or project.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Kerksick is currently an Assistant Professor of Exercise Physiology at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO. His primary research interests include sport nutrition as well as the biochemical, cellular, and molecular

adaptations relative to various forms of exercise and nutrition interventions, primarily those that promote muscle hypertrophy and prevent muscle atrophy in healthy and clinical populations.



MISSION STATEMENT

NSCA's Mission: As the worldwide authority on strength and conditioning, the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) supports and disseminates research-based knowledge, and its practical application to improve athletic performance and fitness.

NSCA's Vision: To advance the strength and conditioning profession.



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