De-Clutter Your Club for a Better Member Experience

By: Bruce Carter

On the cover of a recent issue of “O,” Oprah’s magazine, the heading was “De Clutter Your Life!” It must be a major issue for people to be the cover story. One thing is for sure; it is a major issue for so many clubs.

How Does Clutter Happen for Clubs?

Initially, it often starts out with the assumption that more is better. More items for sale at the front desk. More ads and notices about what the club offers. More ads around the club. More training tools on the exercise floor. Another major culprit is a lack of managerial discipline. Management allows things to be accumulated, not paying much attention to the damage clutter does to a club. Employees stack personal belongings behind the desk. Items that should be stored are left around. Yet, without proper storage and proper display of items, clutter is much more likely to happen. And, here is an interesting thing about clutter, after a while, as the clutter builds, you often don’t see it or even realize it anymore. It becomes normal and therefore accepted.

What Does Clutter Do to a Club?

In general, a lot of clutter creates a “negative” image and energy. Why is this? First, think of when your mind is cluttered, too many thoughts and emotions running around. You can’t focus, you have less energy and you can easily fall into a negative mood. When a person is surrounded by a lot of clutter, he tends to be drained more in that space, can’t focus and has a harder time reaching his goals. As Oprah puts it, “less clutter lightens your life.” Now, what club wants to put people in a negative mood, and therefore, make them less likely to want to stay in that space or keep coming back? Often, this negative process is not something people may be consciously aware of. They just don’t feel comfortable in a club. Obviously, there may be a number of other contributing factors as to why someone does not join or stay a member. But, clutter has far more impact than one may realize or be willing to accept. It would be easy to say, “What does clutter have to do with someone working out?” To some, it would not affect them. But, to others, especially the de-conditioned, less-focused people, it may affect them more.

The second significant aspect of clutter is that it “shrinks” space. More clutter gets in the way, both in actual usability of the space and in the “visual” openness or spaciousness of an area. Clutter takes up space and makes an area look smaller. What club would not want to appear more spacious and inviting? Clutter also affects focus. People either consciously or subconsciously will focus on the clutter when you want them to focus on something else.

Here are key areas that are usually cluttered the most and what can be done to eliminate the clutter.

1. The entrance/lobby/reception desk, the first impression point of a club. More products, more marketing pieces and information about products and signs of club services and programs are put in the front lobby area, thinking the more you have and the more you tell, the more you sell. Then, different staff members keep adding stuff, and the result is an unsightly first impression. Another aspect is that most of the sales space are also cluttered, the sales experience is far from desirable.

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of the entry area is often in the vestibule or near the front doors, cluttered with many items, such as free papers, flyers and pamphlets. Once again, this destroys a clean/clear image, and it is recommended that these items are not put in the entrance.

To prevent all of this, it is imperative that (1) No staff person can add anything without approval; (2) The goal is to control what is made available, and management must continually follow up and remove clutter. Clutter is like an unwanted growth; it just keeps coming back; (3) Proper shelving and display cabinets and storage are a must to organize and then present items in a favorable manner. Properly planned display items are a must for eliminating clutter.

The second major area is group exercise. These areas have added a wide variety of items to allow for a more varied class and exercise program offering. However, it has resulted in these areas becoming substantially cluttered with items wrapping the walls. In other words, a group exercise room has now become a combined exercise and storage room. It is understood that the items are necessary so the solution is proper storage. Ideally, it is best to have a side wall (these walls do not have to go to the ceiling) with two 5’ openings (no doors) and be large enough to store everything. Two openings without doors are necessary to allow for people to enter one side and go out the other to keep an easy, quick flow for getting to class items. Do not be concerned about the space you are taking up if you are already using this space for these items but are totally ruining the effect of a clean, inviting state of the art exercise experience. The other option is to provide built-in shelves for items against the wall, including racks for the large stability balls.

The third major area is the continually evolving functional training area. Here, bands, balls, kettlebells, mats and many more items are used. Often, these items are just thrown about creating an unsightly mess for what should be one of the key, state-of-the-art areas of the club. Once again, a disciplined and trained staff is a must to keep the area neat but also proper storage shelves, bins and racks are a must to have and continually use as part of presenting an overall organized positive space.

Maintaining a positive energy and image is obviously a great goal for any club. Clutter will definitely undermine this goal, and the initial solution is just a regular commitment to eliminate it. Just as members get lazy and don’t want to keep exercising, staff members get lazy and allow clutter to happen. With proper discipline, planning, storage and display, your club will improve its ability to make a member’s experience a rewarding and positive one.

(Bruce Carter owns Optimal Design, the 33-year old design and consulting firm that has created over $800 million dollars worth of successful facilities in 45 states and 27 countries. Bruce can be reached at bruce@optimalsdi.com or 954-888-5960)

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Thanks and Appreciation

At Club Insider, we are excited to be celebrating our 20th Anniversary of this home-based health and fitness club trade newspaper! The thought that this newspaper was founded to serve an industry I truly love, and so that I could become a Mister Mom for my son, Justin, is still intriguing and amazing to us. I wish to extend our most sincere Thanks and Appreciation to everyone that’s made this amazing run possible.

A very sincere Thanks and Appreciation go to Rick Caro, Dr. Gerry Faust and the Faust Executive Roundtable #1 for helping me decide in 1993 what my home-based business would be. Thanks and Appreciation to my long-time friends, Ron Hudspeth and Cathy Miller of Atlanta’s Hudspeth Report for the tremendous assistance they provided us during our first 8 years of publication. Thanks and Appreciation to all of the folks at Walton Press in Monroe, Georgia. They’ve done an absolutely excellent job for us all these years and have printed every one of our monthly editions! Thanks and Appreciation to all of our readers. Sincere Thanks and Appreciation to our Club Insider Advertisers, past and present, for their kind and dedicated support of this publication. It’s amazing to know that we have several advertisers with over 15 years of continuous advertising with us. Plus, we have one advertiser, National Gym Supply, with over 18 years advertising with us and one, Affiliated Acceptance Corporation, with over 19 years as they have advertised in every single edition of Club Insider since the first month that we sold advertising in June, 1994! We also want to say sincere Thanks and Appreciation to all of our Club Insider Contributing Authors, past and present, who’ve contributed hundreds and hundreds of excellent articles to help our readers with their Best Business Practices. Thanks and Appreciation to IHRSA for all it does.

Sincere Thanks and Appreciation to my son, Justin, who started working part-time for Club Insider when he was just 8 years old (helping with mailings). This young man, pretty much behind the scenes for 20 years now, has truly been a fantastic partner for his Dad in Club Insider. Justin does our editing, publication layouts, all of our website design and maintenance, all of our bookkeeping and subscription processing work, as well as archive management and anything else that needs doing, including writing eight cover stories per year.

Last, but surely not least, this writer who refused to fear failure when many told him he didn’t have a chance of surviving the publishing business for even a year, did in fact, survive. He would like to give sincere Thanks and Appreciation to the power that made that survival happen: God.

Very sincerely, with love in my heart for you all,

Norm Cates, Jr.