

From the desk of

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Below is a real letter written by one of my clients almost a decade ago. Other than omitting a few names, the letter is original. I asked my client to write me a letter not for promotion, but to highlight her journey. We all need to be reminded of our journey sometimes.

To help guide the letter, I gave her a list of headings:

1. Why did you join the gym?
2. What were your past experiences with gyms and trainers?
3. Why did you decide to train with me?
4. What were your goals when you began training?
5. What are your goals now?
6. Have your family and friends been supportive? If so, how? If not, how?
7. Have there been any negatives during this journey?
8. What would you say to somebody considering joining the gym?

Read the letter below and you will immediately see the power in it. To be blunt, this is the best piece of promotional material I have ever seen produced for the fitness industry. You could fill a gym with a letter like this.

I have annotated the letter to highlight certain aspects.

I should note that I gave this exercise to all of my clients and only two completed the assignment. The other letter wasn't close to as powerful as the one you are about to read. You will need to sell your clients on the power of this exercise for them, as part of their journey. I didn't do a very good job but even if I did, most won't complete it or will slap it together quickly. That's fine. You only need one. Once done, it will likely take a fair bit of editing. If need be, you can hire an editor to help at [UpWork.com](https://www.upwork.com).

Clear, simple, and succinct first sentence that shows the end of a transformation allowing the rest of the letter to share the story leading to this point.

Compelling headline that includes an immediate hook and hints at an interesting story (religym)

Tales from the Gym Floor: How I joined the gym and found religym!

Joining the gym was the single best thing I have done for myself in the last year.

I have had a few failed gym experiences in the past. I am not sure why I felt compelled to make another attempt at something which was probably not going to work. There were definite reasons that I felt compelled to try something.

1. HEALTH: My doctor was threatening to put me on drugs to control an increasing cholesterol rate. Heart problems, stroke and diabetes have struck pretty much every blood relative of mine and I knew that these were going to be my problems if I didn't do something to prevent that from happening.

2. AGE/VANITY: I joined the gym about 3 weeks after my 49th (ew — yuck) birthday. I still don't feel that old! I couldn't believe what birthday was going to happen to me next. Even more, I hated thinking of myself as being old, fat and ugly. I teach in a school where the majority of teachers are in their 20s, some in their 30s. Being so terribly out of shape made me feel very inferior — and I am just not inferior! Many people seem to regard overweight people as lacking self-control, as being stupid or uninteresting. Those are not my negative qualities (I do have lots of other ones), but I felt that people did not really see my strengths because they did not look deeper than the exterior.

3. STRESS: My husband has had cancer for many years. He has had numerous operations which have taken a severe toll on his lifestyle, and therefore, the lives of my children and me. The past two years have been impossible; heavy doses of chemo and steroids have altered his intellect and personality. The cancer and treatments have led to other health problems. It is very lonely to live with someone whose main focus in life is his own survival. It is tiring to be the only capable parent in a household. It is depressing to watch someone slowly, slowly die. Even worse was finding out that my spouse's cancer was caused by a gene which he may have passed on to my children. Adding all of this to everyday stress was almost unbearable.

Immediate vulnerability that arouses curiosity.

Very specific problem that our ideal prospect will be able to identify with.

The best stories are the ones that go deep — even if it isn't pretty.

For the first time in my entire life, I was really frightened by depression. This was such a dramatic contrast to my usual personality — optimistic, happy, cheerful. I **am not a quitter**. I knew that I had to take charge of my situation. While I could not change all of my problems, I could change some of them and put up a good fight against the others. **That's why I decided to try the gym one more time.**

Gym Memberships

I joined Body and Soul gym in December, 2009.
Previously I belonged to:

The gym at Yorkdale shopping mall

(don't remember the name) many years ago — huge disaster. Way too busy.

The Dunfield Club — because that was the gym of my trainer/friend at the time. It was nice, but too big and impersonal. I don't remember why I stopped going.

A women-only gym at Bayview & Eglinton (about 10 years ago). It was okay, but I had no positive results and just stopped going.

Body and Soul when it first opened. It enjoyed it for about 3 or 4 months. The membership had started with a physical assessment. I had a re-assessment after 3 or 4 months which showed very little improvement! That was very discouraging. I kept my membership for another 6 months, but this was during a particularly stressful period with my husband's illness. For the final 3 months of the membership, I **did not enter the gym once.**

Trainers

Over the years, I worked with 4 trainers before working with Jonathan

It's impossible to not have a visceral, emotional reaction to this. It's real and raw but shows strength and power and motivation and eventually leads to what this letter is about — joining the gym.

Let's talk about past experiences. Name your competitors if you can and talk about how you're better without saying that they aren't good — just that this person has had a better experience with you than others.

Again — honesty and vulnerability are big here. She tried before with our club and failed. This arouses even more curiosity because obviously things have turned around.

The first was a friend who was just getting into the business. She was pretty tough and I saw good results. I enjoyed working with her. I don't remember why we stopped.

The second trainer was through a package offered at the women's gym. I worked with the trainer the gym suggested, though I would not have chosen her myself. I didn't really like her as a person; she was not too bright and had no personality. I could not wait for the pre-paid sessions to end and did not see any results. I had the impression that gyms pushed trainers in order to make extra money off the clients (yes, I really thought that!).

The third trainer was {NAME omitted} at Body and Soul. She was great! We had a lot of fun together. I felt that I was working hard and having fun but, as I mentioned above, did not really get any visible results from the sessions. I got tired of working with her even though I really liked her as a person. I canceled a number of sessions and was always pleased when she had to cancel an appointment. We worked together twice a week, every week, which, in retrospect, may have been too often. I work well by myself.

The fourth trainer was {name omitted} at Body and Soul. When I re-joined the Body and Soul last December, he approached me regarding training sessions. At that point, I thought it would be a good idea to work with someone to get started with a proper gym plan. Things went well at first but I soon realized that he was not the right person for me. He was often not available for sessions, so I would be repeating the same things too many times. He sometimes did not follow through with answers to questions, or the answers did not sound right. Coincidentally, he left the gym at that point, just as I was wondering how to tactfully negotiate a change of trainer. I was already pretty sure that I wanted to work with Jon.

So, finally, here is the good part of my story. **With all those past gym experiences that did not work out or which were not so memorable, why is my current gym experience working so well?**

I really like my gym. It is close to home, which is really important.

Beginning to overcome potential objections before the prospect even has a chance to set foot in the gym. (Can you count how many objections are overcome in the next 4 paragraphs?)

I usually go to the gym before going home from work so that I don't get distracted, which might prevent me from doing a workout. While I don't really know the other clients at the gym, I think they are probably pretty much from my neighborhood, so there is a familiar feel about them.

I like the size of the gym — small and personal, yet not so small that I have to wait for machines or work too closely next to someone I don't know. I like the esthetic of the gym — simple white walls and open beamed ceilings. One of the trainers once mentioned to me in passing that Body and Soul is a “nerdy” gym — I find that thought appealing!

I have had more than a few conversations with various trainers about books, opera and Beethoven — that was unexpected! The people who work at the gym are all incredibly nice. In my first months at the gym, I was so self-conscious that I found it hard to even say hello to them. Now, pretty much everyone talks to me — which I love.

One of the trainers gives me little health insights, one chats with me about music and concerts and another often compliments me on my progress. It is very welcoming to work out in this environment; it makes me more comfortable. It's a bit disappointing on days when the trainers are not in because it feels more impersonal

How did I choose my trainer / how did I know he was the right one?

As I think he knows, I really attribute the positive results to Jon. I have worked with lots of people one-on-one in a music setting (very similar to the trainer/client experience) and I know that the teacher/student relationship has to be just right for everything to work.

When I was still training with {name omitted}, I would watch Jon work with

clients; he seemed to be tough, but also lots of fun. This is exactly the way I teach and I thought Jon would be a good match for me. Having gotten to know him better, I also find him very intelligent, ambitious, courteous, thoughtful and insightful — all qualities that I admire and need from someone to whom I look for advice.

I learned a long time ago that if I could walk all over somebody, I inevitably would. I think that's why I wrote off the other trainers. Jon seemed far more formidable than that! In our initial sessions, I was scared that, if I wasn't good enough, he would give me the boot. That fear must have come from my music student experience, because I no longer have that impression of you; however, it got me off to a diligent start. Now, I enjoy working with Jon because I see the great progress I have made, in strength, overall fitness and weight loss. I enjoy working with Jon because I respect him. Whenever I have a question or want to schedule some sessions, he often responds to my emails within minutes. I really appreciate that.

In the months we have been working together, I have not had any injuries — that's fantastic! I really trust that he is having me do things I am capable of, while still pushing forward to tougher things. I enjoy all the positive reinforcement but I also appreciate that he made me work pretty hard for about 2 months before he coughed up a solid compliment. I think that Jon is an amazing teacher. When I have trouble picking up something new, he is good at breaking it down into smaller steps.

It seems that I have made all this progress in a seamless fashion. In retrospect, I don't have the impression that I have been working hard; I just have the impression that I have been having fun. I really like Jon as a person and I think he really understands what makes me click. I am certain that this is why things have gone so well. With other trainers, I always reached a point where I just wanted the sessions to stop so that I could do my own thing. With Jon, that hasn't happened once. I look forward to every session and can't wait to see what is coming next. I

am also pretty impressed that he asked me to write this letter — I'm glad that he is interested in my opinion!

Nutrition

It is pretty much an accepted fact that, in order to lose weight, you need to combine exercise with proper diet. It was very convenient that Jon could help me with both. In the past months, I have totally changed the way I eat. What I liked the most about the way he changed my diet was that he changed things in small steps.

Jon didn't try to do a sudden overhaul of my diet — just made little suggestions that were easy to gradually fit in with what I was already doing. Initially, it was very helpful to submit the daily eating sheets. I really did not want to hand in a sheet filled with embarrassing (stupid) food choices so it made me really think more carefully about what I was eating. It was very helpful that he didn't mind me handing you those sheets for about 2 months!

I have reached a point where I really have control over what I am eating. I can walk into Phipp's and buy a bagful of goodies for someone else without buying a single treat for myself. I can walk past a plateful of cookies sitting on a table without even wanting to eat one. I still use the nutrition sheets sometimes when I start to get off track - there have been days where my entire carb/produce intake was a banana and a glass of wine.

Past Goals

When I rejoined the gym last December, I set 2 easy goals for myself:

- 1) to get to the gym a minimum of twice a week
- 2) to try to get my weight at least below 150 (from a starting point of 173 — OY)

I find this so hard to imagine now, that the first time back on the treadmill last

Similar to mentioning the other gyms earlier, Phipps is a popular local cafe in the neighbourhood of the gym. Naming one or a few local institutions always hammers in a true neighbourly feel you're going for.

December, I was actually shaking. I was under so much stress at the time that I can still remember that moment. There is certainly something therapeutic about hiding behind the headphones and just pounding away on a treadmill for 45 minutes. I think that is why it was easy to get the gym regularly in those first weeks.

Also, being at the gym is all about me. No one asks me to do anything for them at the gym. This is partially why I now go to the gym every day — it is my moment for myself, which rarely happens at home or at work. Also, by going every single day, I never think about which days I should go and which ones to take off. I just always go, like always brushing my teeth. That way I never worry about missing a day here or there.

It took about 9 months to lose 25 pounds. I didn't think it would take that long. This has definitely been the hardest part of my story. I know that it is somewhat irrelevant. In spite of the number on the scale, I know that I look and feel a lot better today than I did one year ago.

Future Goals

- 1) I still think that I should probably weigh about 10 or 20 pounds less than I do but this is not my main focus anymore.
- 2) I want to be sure to maintain at least a 5-day a week gym habit (and preferably stick to the 7-day plan) and not lose any ground on my eating habits. I still need to eat more raw vegetables and fruit.
- 3) This past summer I spent an incredibly happy week in Cape Breton. While the trip was full of great and varied experiences, I truly loved getting exercise in natural surroundings — hiking and kayaking. These are things I NEVER do at home and haven't done in such a long time.

Support/Reactions From Friends / Family

Fortunately, I have not had much negative response to this lifestyle change. My husband does not like the change of cuisine — he needs more carbs and less protein in his diet, which is the opposite of what I need. He cooks a lot more for himself now. My daughter complains frequently that I get home later from work and so spend less time with her. I'm glad that my teenager still wants to spend time with me.

Many of my friends make regular comments on my new and improved look. Some people have never commented — I don't know if this is passive negativity or just a polite reluctance to acknowledge that I used to look not so great. I recently forwarded a Body & Soul promotion to several friends — there was not one taker. That's a shame. **More people need to know about this place.**

Negatives

There are definitely negatives to the intense gym experience. Expenditure of time and money are the obvious big issues. Additionally though, when I get home at 6:30 after a full day of work plus a serious workout, I am often really tired. I don't feel like cooking or emptying the dishwasher. My house has never looked worse. I am procrastinating on a lot of small things. I'm getting too accustomed to compliments — it's time to get over that.

I also worry that maybe I am getting a bit too independent and self-focused. With the same control that lets me walk by a plate of cookies without even wanting to have one, I have managed to completely shut out my husband's medical issues from my emotions — which is a lot healthier for me but maybe not so nice.

I am worried that I will, at some point, fall back to old habits, stop coming to the gym, start eating too much, regain weight. This is why I am afraid to eat even 1 cookie or miss 1 day of going to the gym. I don't know what would happen if my

gym would close. I am very connected to this place — I find it hard to think of going anywhere else. Additionally, I am worried that Jon is going to move along at some point, and my good luck story will end. I have connected so much of my progress to the fact that he works so well for me.

I guess she had a point ...

Fortunately, she's still doing well almost a decade later.

Emotions

I guess that I have always thought of people going to the gym as being similar to the way I go to concerts — hardly life-changing and certainly not something referred to as a “journey.” I am a bit bewildered by the impact that the gym experience has had on my life. I find it interesting that, in Jon’s written request for this story, he asked for “brutal honesty” and descriptions of emotion. I did not anticipate any emotional connection with a gym. On the surface, going to the gym should be as simple as pushing weights up and down, over and over again.

Over the past 3 or 4 months, people have told me almost daily that I look great, fantastic. That has had a huge impact on my sense of well-being. For me to spend 1 ½ - 2 hours EVERY DAY on MYSELF rather than on my family has had a tremendous impact on my sense of independence. This past summer, planning a trip by myself and for myself when my family was trying so hard to get me to do the group thing with them — I felt that was a big deal for me. I would not have done it a year ago. That summer trip gave me back my “happy place.”

I remember doing an exercise with Jon one day; he told me to think of my happy place, and all I could think was “how pathetic, I don’t have one.” My life is going to change completely in the next 2 or 3 years as my children leave home and I will probably no longer have a husband. Change can be good, but also stressful... strength is crucial for me as I feel this looming. A simple thing like being able to jump 4 step boxes is symbolic of conquering fear and having power and control. It also brings me back to my happy place — on a mountain, in a forest, beside the water, leaping over logs. Imagine!

Conclusions

- It never hurts to try just one more time.
- My gym is comfortable and has a unique personality. Some people hate going to the gym — I love going to mine. It's good to actually find a place you enjoy visiting every day.
- Start slowly with small expectations and then build up.
- I was so intimidated in the gym at first and felt sort of out-of-place. I didn't talk to anyone unless they spoke to me first. Do other people feel that way at first?
- To choose a trainer, spend a few hours on the treadmill analyzing the people on the gym floor. Figure out whose style might match your personality. Don't just sign on with the person who asks you or a new trainer the gym is trying to push.
- Keep a training journal to track progress. I didn't, but wish I did. Writing this has been enlightening. It is very encouraging to look back over the past months, think about the what, why and how, and to realize what a positive force the gym has been for me.

Happy Tales From The Gym Floor

One day when my son {Name omitted} was at The Running Room, talking about all the stuff he was up to, he was asked if anyone else in his family was athletic. He told them, "My mom is." That made me happy!

One day my friend Sue went home from work and was telling her husband about something I had said. He asked her, "Who is Elizabeth?" She replied, "You know, we sat with her at Melissa's wedding.... brown hair, red dress, she has the daughter

graduating from Harvard.” His response — “How can she have a daughter graduating from Harvard? She’s like 35 years old.” Please refer back to the 2nd reason I joined the gym YAY YAY YAY!!!

This summer I went hiking with 2 teenage athletes and a triathlete and it was ME who led the pace.... and I wasn’t even pushing all that hard!

I can get my heart rate up to 186. Please refer back to the 1st reason that I joined the gym!

Last September, for the beginning of the school year, I was buying pants in size 12. This year, the new clothes were either size 6 or 4. That’s a miracle.

One day, during a session with Jon, one of his client’s asked him a question, after which he turned to me and made a comment on how he noticed how well I have been doing and that I could be the poster girl for the gym! Ha ha ha. I was mildly embarrassed but I sure told lots of friends about that. I love compliments.

At the gym today, I bench pressed 95 pounds and dead-lifted 125 pounds. I love telling people that. And that’s just today.

When I joined the gym last December, I was a wreck. Today, I am once again the person I have always thought myself to be — strong and happy, bouncing off the walls. I accomplished that by myself with a lot of help from Jon.

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Here is how you can end a letter like this with a call to action:

This entire experience has been life-changing and I would love to share my gym (and trainer) with you. The best part? The team is going to make a donation to {ENTER CHARITY} when you do join the gym if you bring this letter in with you.

You can call _____, email _____, or simply walk in anytime. If you do, make sure to say hello.

Thanks for letting me share my story.

-YOUR CLIENT'S NAME