



FITBODY FUSION: Raising The Bar In Coaching

by Rachel Payne

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“ My passion is teaching other motivated individuals to achieve their optimal physique in a way that’s healthy & sustainable.”

What is the history behind FitBody Fusion?

FitBody Fusion was incorporated in 2011. I’ve had a passion for bodybuilding all my life. I actually competed in powerlifting in high school, and then began bodybuilding in the 80s. My life then went in a different direction, college, kids, and career. But bodybuilding was always there, always something I was passionate about, and I continued to watch from the wings. In my late 30s, I had a successful corporate career, sold our company and basically retired. It was at that point, I decided I wanted to compete and I just fell in love with it. I turned pro in 2011 at the USA’s, and qualified for the Olympia at my second pro show.

I began coaching others and was really passionate about helping women find the most healthy way to approach a prep. It was a time when people weren't talking about some of the pitfalls, challenges and difficulties around body image and the relationship with food, and the influence of a positive mindset. I saw a real opportunity to really help women combat some of these issues and find better ways to accomplish the results they desired. The coaching kind of just evolved and I realized I didn't want to be a singular coach, I wanted to bring together a team of coaches. That epiphany developed from two main reasons. One, I didn't want to have so many clients that it became a watered down sort of experience for them. I wanted to be able to really dedicate and commit myself to my clients, but I still wanted to be able to grow the team. Second, I felt we could learn better in a group. The idea of bringing coaches together that could share different ideas, challenge me and at the same time provide opportunities for growth led to building an amazing group of coaches. We're all there, supporting each other, and helping each other. Within our business infrastructure, we provide the coaches with a lot of the support, administrative support, accounting, billing, marketing, the things that most coaches don't really want to mess with and I'm very proficient at, giving them more time to coach and focus on their athletes. It became a really awesome opportunity to collaborate with these other coaches.



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What is FitBody Fusion?

FitBody Fusion is about building a community, for athletes to feel supported in a way that they can aspire, reach and thrive. We are providing a place that athletes of all different walks of life, all different fitness levels, whether it's competition, transformation, or lifestyle, can feel comfortable and strive towards reaching their goals while feeling supported. We have a team of coaches that come from all different walks of life, all ages, we have single people, we have mothers, fathers, we have people that do coaching full time, and we have some people that do coaching part time and have other full time jobs, which allows them to bring their experience and apply those experiences to help our athletes. FitBody fusion is about family, it's about connection, it's about building a space where people can thrive without feeling like they're alone, intimidated, or embarrassed. That support factor is really, really important to us.

So does FitBody Fusion only do online coaching?

Yes, that's correct.

So how many coaches and how many athletes do you have?

We have a little over 30 coaches all over the world and we have over 2000 athletes. We're based out of the US, but we do have a presence in some countries outside of the US. We do currently have coaches in Europe right now and we coach athletes all around the world including North America, Asia, South America, Central America and Canada.



Our goal is to insure that our athletes get the attention they need. Growing our team allows us to do that. Our programs are all custom. Each athlete's macros and training programs are customized to each athlete based on what their individual needs and goals are. Everyone's different, and everybody has a different starting point. We do our best to accommodate that. That's one of the reasons we have a variety of coaches. In the case of coaches and athletes, one size does not fit all. Both ability and adaptability have to be considered. One athlete may need some tough love, and another athlete may need a little bit softer attention. You still have to be assertive when it comes to goals, and make sure that athletes are following the plan but it's all in the delivery and the tone. On the other hand, we know people love being a part of a team for the community and camaraderie. It's one of the reasons I created FitBody Fusion apparel; helping people feel like they're a part of something. Obviously, it's also a great marketing and branding tool.

I was looking on your Instagram, who in the heck is gathering all that data? If you have these people competing all over the world, how do you get it all?

We have an amazing internal staff and all of our job duties basically come together to keep everything on the back end, running efficiently. We have athletes at shows every weekend and there is always a coach on site at the shows we sponsor. They collect athletes' numbers, get their photos, report back to the person who makes the graphics. We have a system in place to insure we're collecting certain pieces of information to keep track of the athletes. It's a lot, but we managed to make it a success.

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So, is there one person that assigns all the different athletes to the rest of the coaches?

Many of the athletes' coaching assignments are by request. We also pair athletes with coaches based on what their goals are, and who we think will best click with them therefore increasing the chances they will reach their goals successfully.

Does FitBody Fusion provide seminars for their clientele? Or do you mostly partner with other people putting on a seminar?

It's a combination of the two. I would say more often than not we are partnering with others for seminars because it just makes sense for us to be a part of the events where a lot of athletes will be. I'm working with Sandy right now on some things that we're gonna do for the NPC Women's Workshop and I'm really involved with Shawn Hector Lewis and the Cuties Conquering The Stage events. We also put on our annual conference which is a lot of fun. Of course, we get involved with smaller seminars that are at shows or held on the local level and from time to time we hold pop up clinics that our coaches put on all over the country. It's an opportunity for our athletes to get a little bit more hands on, versus some of the bigger seminars where you've got hundreds of people. We do a kind of a combination of all of those things. In addition, we have YouTube posing videos anyone can access.

In a similar fashion, have you established partnerships or affiliate relationships with other companies, for example, the suits, the shoes, the tanning, meal prep, etc. that you are able to get discounts for your team members?

We definitely work with a couple of different companies. We do have discount codes that we'll pass along to the athlete. One example is Trifecta Nutrition.

How many shows do you sponsor a year?

Oh, my gosh, I want to say this past year, it was about it was between 50 and 60.



Wow, that's a lot. No wonder your business background comes in handy. What sets you apart from all the other teams that are out there?

The thing that makes the FitBody Fusion different from the other teams out there is first and foremost, the sense of community and sense of family. The variety of coaches that we have, and the ability for an athlete to choose who they feel they would have the best connection with. At the same time, we are so collaborative, we really support each other, we learn from each other, we provide all of our coaches with a lot of educational opportunities, both in terms of the leadership training courses and we do collaboration meetings where we come together and discuss different subjects within fitness bodybuilding like challenges with clients, or new training methods. We're constantly sharing ideas, thoughts, information, and support. It's that community sort of feel; we really show up for our athletes, and for each other. There's always a coach on site at the shows our athletes compete in, providing support and a hands on sort of experience, which I think, is huge. For most of us, competing is a hobby. So if you're not having fun, why would you want to spend all your time, energy, and money doing it? We want people to have an experience that allows them to grow as a person, have fun, find connection, and community. All these things that really help them become a better version of themselves and enjoy the process.

What has been the best part about FitBody Fusion for you?

The best part is the relationships and the connection with the people. I have developed great relationships with fitness insiders, judges, promoters and other coaches. One of the driving forces for me in starting this team, having previously worked in a male dominated industry, was that I wanted a connection with other women, a place to uplift each other, support each other, help each other. Even though we aren't just a female team, initially, our goal was to create an environment where even in a very competitive, individualistic type of sport there's opportunity for us to support each other and inspire each other. It continues to be a huge part of our culture, it makes us special and no matter what, we can always be assured knowing that our team appreciates each other, is inspired by each other, and helps each other.

What's been your biggest challenge?

There's been a lot of challenges. One of the biggest was navigating the pandemic. As coaches, the uncertainty of shows and access to gyms was scary at first but turned into opportunity and while it challenged us to find ways to make it work, it was really amazing to watch us all come together. Obviously, as with any business owner, maintaining corporate culture and handling different personalities of the coaches and athletes is always challenging. But that is one of my strengths and where much of my experience is and is what I really love the most; it's exciting and fun.

What do you see is the future vision for your company?

The way I see it, we want to just keep growing and continue to build. Build good athletes, and build our coaches to be the best in class. We strive to provide everything that we can for our athletes to have a good experience. It's not always about the results. Yes, everybody wants to win and that's important, but the most important thing for us is how an athlete feels when they walk away from a show. Even if they didn't get the placing they had hoped for, when they walk away from the show being a part of Team FitBody Fusion we want them to walk away saying, "you know what, I felt like I was taken care of, I felt like I had attention given to me, I felt I brought a good package, and I feel really good leaving this show." When we have an athlete that leaves a show having a good experience, then we know we did our job well. There are still a lot of other opportunities we have for growth and to bring value to our athletes, maybe even potentially opening a location. Right now, we just want to make sure that we're maintaining our culture that we're making sure our clients are feeling supported. We also plan to continue to attend and participate at the shows, and support the promoters. I fully believe, if we love this sport, we all have a responsibility to support it. Obviously, we also sponsor events to advertise ourselves. We are there to keep our industry alive and growing and well, so that we can all do what we're passionate about. So we're gonna keep doing more of that for sure.





How does the Transformation/Lifestyle side of FitBody Fusion appeal to the masses and have greater impact on the health and fitness in the lives of the general public?

What's cool about that is a lot of the people that come on to our transformation lifestyle programs do so because they're inspired by the athletes. It's interesting from a marketing perspective, if you think about what a niche that we have in the bodybuilding world, it's so very different than marketing against Weight Watchers and Nutrisystem. What we've found is that many people who are not necessarily looking to get on stage, are inspired by the physiques that they're seeing in the bodybuilding world and that is the look they want to aspire to achieve. As a result, quite a large portion of our business evolves around the transformation/ lifestyle clients.

Have you thought about venturing to, let's say, the pageant world, or some of the Hooters type competitions? Or training other type of athletes?

No. I will say that I feel strongly that whatever you focus on is what you get really good at. For example, I coach bikini, and while I do have maybe a handful of wellness and a couple of figure athletes that I coach, I feel I'm really good at coaching bikini. That's what I look at all day, every day, that's what I'm talking to the judges to get feedback on every day. If you spread your focus out too much amongst too many things, you risk becoming a jack of all trades, master of none. That's what is great about our team is; if I recognize that I'm not really the right coach for you, we have other coaches on our team that will be better suited for that client's' needs and making sure we're getting our client the kind of support they want and need.

You are changing the way it's done.

Thank you, I appreciate that so much. It was cool for me to come from a completely different kind of business and be able to apply those same tools. I taught graduate school; MBA students in marketing, management, internet marketing, and I also specialize in organizational behavior. I approached the coaching business with a different set of tools, and looked at things a little bit differently. I feel like my corporate and educational background kicked in and it became this really cool, amazing business. It's been exciting to see the business flourish.

Our coaches are independent contractors, so they are their own business owners. So we're here to provide more of a service for our coaches. We provide them with the accounting support, the marketing support, training, education, and affiliate types of programs. Our goal is to continue to bring value to them. We will bring in different speakers to talk to them about sole proprietorships or small business growth, investments, retirement, health benefits, and more. In the long term, I do see our coaches continuing to benefit and while I won't give away any secrets at this time, I am working on what that will ultimately look like. I'm excited for the possibilities of what the future can hold.

What message do you really want to our readers to know about FitBody Fusion? What is it you want to share with them?

When people go to FitBodyFusion.com, I want them to know what our mission is: FitBody Fusion creates belonging and community, with a team of compassionate and experienced coaches, empowering its athletes to embrace a balanced individual and sustainable lifestyle. At the end of the day, our focus as a business is to support our coaches in creating the very best athlete experience possible to help athletes not just know how to workout, or what to eat every day, but to feel supported, and to feel like they're learning and growing as individuals. It's important to balance what is a hobby for most people with the rest of their lives, their families, their careers, and all the other things, for their health and for something that's sustainable in your life. To create a plan that isn't distracting, but it's actually adding value to their lives and helping our clients continue to grow.

The fact that you're able to make this kind of impact by creating the infrastructure similar to the way a real estate company services its agents, I can only imagine, that some of the other teams out there have to wonder, "How are they doing that? How are they making it work?" and it's got to make them step up. If they want to have the quality coaches under them and they want to grow themselves, they've got to elevate their process. So you've raised the bar. And that's pretty cool.