



A Safe Business Approach to Gym Care

I'm happy to report that my business career has paralleled the growth of the business of gymnastics. I do mean the business of gymnastics and not the sport of gymnastics. The business has been on a steady growth curve since the early 1970s. When I started training, and competing it was in a shared space at the YMCA or in a small multipurpose room at American Turners. When I first ran a gymnastic program, I moved all of my equipment (and mats) in a Chevy Van (series 30). Today we get to work with countries, corporations, and entrepreneurs around the world that are working with up to 50,000 square feet of dedicated space. Yes. I'd say the sport has grown up.

I'm proud to announce that I will be working with USA Gymnastics at several upcoming Business Forums that will be held in conjunction with Regional and National Congresses and at some of the national gymnastic events. We just completed a very successful business forum in Newark, New Jersey in conjunction with the AT&T American Cup and Nastia Liukin Cup. It was very successful as approximately 60 people from the business world of gymnastics gathered to share and learn.

My contribution is usually involved with proper selection, use, and care of gymnastic equipment. We discuss everything from how to spot upcoming equipment problems to proper selection and use of equipment. In addition, when I get the chance to talk with business owners, we discuss parallels with other recreation centers and sports activity business. I find that there a lot of club owners that are doing the right things but perhaps not following through to the full extent.

Local or government regulation usually lags behind the growth of the business, but it's arrival is inevitable. There was a time when restaurants didn't get called on by food inspectors, but now the health department visits anyone selling food from elegant restaurants to the Little League hot dog stand. Swimming pools used to monitor themselves until government regulation required daily water tests and chemical balancing. Family entertainment centers that run birthday parties using inflatable bounce houses and slides in some states now require state certified inspectors to approve every time the attraction is inflated. In addition, many of these government regulated processes require inspection logs, maintenance and repair logs, and equipment certification. This is what we should expect to come to the gymnastic club business.

I don't report this to scare anyone. As I have said, a lot of gymnastic clubs are doing all the right things.... except, perhaps, for keeping an accurate paper trail. Increasingly more services are available to the gymnastic market that help you, the club owner, protect one of you most valuable assets, your club. Gym inspection apps and computer programs are emerging to help you gather the important information.

My rule of thumb is 1) Daily visual inspection 2) Monthly hands on inspections and maintenance, 3) Annual or semiannual detail inspection by an outside professional. Each of these steps will come with its own set of paperwork or digital recording. As you grow your business there are members of your business team the will want you to keep this information. Your investors and bankers want to know how you are caring for their money. Your insurance agent will want to know that you are maintaining a safe environment, your government entities will want to know that you are following all local regulations. And many other groups and agencies will

also have and interest especially if you have interest in growing in areas of pre-school care, after school day care, home school instruction, babysitting, and more.

Our goal should be to develop these habits of inspection, care, and maintenance and keep accurate records so that when the outside agencies do come calling, we can show them the system that we have in place and hopefully they adopt it and we have set our own standards of excellence and care. Please start today – Daily inspections, Monthly Hands on Inspections and maintenance, and Annual Inspection by outside professional. If you want suggestions or help, feel free to contact me at steve.cook@fotlinc.com. We're in this together. Let's grow the right way.

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