

Make a resolution to change your life

Every year as January 1 dawns, many of us are full of good intentions – we resolve to embark on a keep fit programme, give up alcohol and become less stressed

Gyms and fitness centres offer tempting packages and we sign on the dotted line, enthused at the prospect of “starting the New Year with a new body”.

The truth however is slightly different. An estimated nine out of 10 people stop going regularly to the gym within six weeks of joining and the good intentions soon disappear – unlike the Christmas waistline.

The problem is that without someone to motivate, encourage and occasionally bully us along, it's all too easy to opt for the lazy approach – and that's why personal training sessions offer the best solution to fitness.

One local businessman who recognises the benefits is Richard Stephens, the founder of marketing and design agency Creative Direction, who turned from an initially reluctant keep fit candidate into someone quite literally with a whole new lease of life.

Stephens, who admits at 53 “was rather unfit”, met Carl Garton, who owns and runs The Fit Farm, when his wife Jan bought him a set of 10 personal training sessions as a Christmas present in December 2005.

He said: “I thought the idea of having a “personal trainer” was a bit soft, and the idea that I needed somebody to help get me back into shape rubbed against the grain a bit.”

As soon as he started however, he realised he had underestimated the programme. “From the very first session it was obvious there was going to be nothing soft about Carl's approach to training,”

he said. “I found my body working harder than it has for 30 years, and what's more, starting to enjoy it.”

It was a decision that may have saved his life. Regular exercise sessions identified a recurring chest pain, which on further investigation was discovered to be angina and coronary heart disease, with a 90% obstruction in one of the main arteries to his heart.

After a small operation and six weeks recuperation, Garton, an ex-Royal Marine devised a rehabilitation exercise programme and by July 2006, tests showed Stephens is now fitter that he was 25 years ago, and his cholesterol level has dropped from 6.2 to 3.4.

“Not only did the training highlight my condition, it has transformed my whole life, I look better, eat better and I feel much better than I have for decades,” he said.

Garton believes Stephens' example underlines why it is so important to take health and fitness seriously and will tailor make personal training sessions to adapt to an individual's lifestyle, helping them get the most out of the training.

In the workplace

It's not just individuals who benefit from improving their lifestyle, the corporate environment is full of stressed out, unfit individuals whose sedentary jobs and long hours mean they have little chance to exercise.

Garton says businesses should take the wellbeing of their employees seriously as a fitter and healthier workforce means less time lost to illness, increased productivity



Carl Garton (right) puts Richard Stephens through his paces

and a happier working environment.

Fit 4 Work, is Garton's answer – a corporate training programme which delivers fitness and wellbeing directly into the workplace and which is already proving a success with staff at Q Associates, a specialist IT organisation based in Beedon, near Newbury.

Managing director David Cue asked Garton to design a bespoke fitness programme to encourage and motivate his 50-plus team of staff to become more interested in their fitness and give them the opportunity to do something about it.

“I was concerned that my team spend a lot of time sitting behind a desk and wanted to find something that would be interesting and fun, make them feel better and more healthy and to thank them for their hard work,” he said.

Under his Fit 4 Work banner, Garton carried out confidential one-to-one interviews with staff, including a comprehensive health assessment designed to help identify potential issues, such as high cholesterol or blood sugar levels.

This was followed by metabolic testing sessions which enabled him to devise healthy eating programmes for staff to help them become both more mentally alert and physically fitter.

Stage three was the launch of regular circuit training sessions which take place near Q Associates' offices once a week, giving staff a great reason to get up from their desk at the end of the day and have fitness training without having to worry about going to the gym.

“Every week more people attend as they are encouraged by the colleagues and it's fun for them, there's a great deal of camaraderie and we are even training one 61-year-old employee for a half marathon,” said Garton.

Cue says the whole experience has been “entirely positive” and that by helping staff keep fit, it's good for their health and good for the business.

Fit 4 Work is ideal for organisations with 50+ employees and a flexible fee scheme means companies can either choose to fund the whole programme as a staff benefit, or subsidise particular elements, leaving employees to pay, for example, for each exercise class they attend.

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Three-day detox course

Looking for a Christmas present that will make a lifetime's difference? Ideal for those who want to start 2007 with a real commitment to health and wellbeing, The Fit Farm is running an intensive three-day detox course at Littlecote House, near Hungerford.

The event, for a maximum of 20 people, includes dedicated one-to-one health, wellbeing and lifestyle appraisals, together with metabolic typing and nutrition advice.

Group exercise classes including yoga and qui-gong, a powerful meditative form of exercise.

“Whether it's a personal treat, a gift or even a company thank you, this course is ideal for anyone who wants to kick start their new year,” said Garton. “We promise to transform the way they think about food, exercise and wellbeing and it's the start of a healthy new lifestyle.”

The fully inclusive course runs from January 19-22 and costs £595, fully inclusive. Book before December 20 for a 10% discount by visiting www.fitfarm.co.uk.



Carl Garton training staff at Q Associates