



# Ask the Experts

A roundtable with our favorite fitness gurus.

*The Robb Report Collection's* editors recently checked in with a select few fitness experts for a Q & A: Andy Clay, a cofounder with Rick Hagaman of the Los Angeles–based Blue Clay Fitness; Mark Harigian, the “architect of anatomy,” also based in Los Angeles; Theresa McQueen, the fitness director at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, Fla.; and Joe Dowdell, who runs the 10,000-square-foot Peak Performance studio in New York. Between them, they have numerous health-and-fitness awards, accolades, and certifications, and decades of experience training top athletes and clients of all abilities. In order to best motivate our readers to find their perfect trainer, we asked these experts key questions about getting started on the road to optimum wellness, maintaining a healthy fitness routine, and living better. Compiled by Bailey S. Barnard, Hayley Lerch, and Oliver Slosser.

## **Andy Clay, Blue Clay Fitness**

***What is your first step when you get a new client?***

Fitness assessment. We do several different strength tests. We do a push-up test, sit-up test, sit and reach (which shows their flexibility), then we do a three-minute step cardio test. In order to track results, we don't really use the scale, because if you weigh 300 pounds and look and feel exactly the way you want to and your body functions properly, then who cares? We do the assessment so that we also have a benchmark by which to evaluate our clients. We'll evaluate brand-new clients, then after three, six, nine months, we'll have measurable results.

***Do you find that clients come in with certain expectations?***

Most people have unrealistic expectations. They're watching TV. On a show like *The Biggest Loser*, those people are working out four or five hours a day and their diet is strictly supervised. Most people are not disciplined enough to do that on their own. We do offer dietary suggestions, but people come in and say, "I want to work out once a week, I want to eat what I want, and I want the body I've always wanted." It just doesn't work that way. We really work on managing people's expectations and managing a realistic time frame. We certainly don't operate by telling people that we're going to completely transform their body in 30 days. It doesn't work like that.

***What steps would you advise for people to achieve more realistic weight-loss expectations?***

It's all about food. If you cut out sugar and white flour, no matter what you do you're going to lose weight. Eighty percent of it is nutrition. You should be eating five small meals a day, which means you should be eating every three to four hours. Protein portions should never be bigger than a deck of cards. That's about four ounces of protein; you don't need any more than that.

***How do you go about providing home gyms for clients who wish to take that step?***

We'll go in and recommend what they should have in their gym, and then we have several companies we work with who do just that. First we talk about the results they want, then we talk about the space and see what we can do. We determine the most multifunctional equipment that will work for that space. The companies we work with the most are Advantage Fitness Products (AFP) and Out-Fit. What exactly our clients want or what equipment they want is going to determine whether we go with AFP or Out-Fit.

***What is your favorite piece of fitness equipment?***

I would probably say the Power Plate (see Gadgets & Gear, page 28), just because you can get a full-body workout in 30 minutes. You should do cardiovascular in addition to this unless you're doing really intense circuit training. The most effective way to reduce fat and lose weight is to build lean muscle. For every pound of lean muscle you build, you're losing more calories. It's also helpful for clients who have had injuries. We dealt with a woman who injured her hip and had very little range of motion. On the Power Plate, we were able to do static movement and exercises until she was actually able to get more of a range of motion back.



***What do you recommend for cardio?***

Interval training. I'll put somebody on a treadmill and warm them up for three minutes at a fast walk—the fastest you can walk before you have to run—then what I'll basically do is one minute on, two minutes off. I'll have you do a run that is challenging for a minute, bring you down to that fast walk, take you up to the run that's challenging again, then bring you back down again. Twenty minutes is the minimum, 45 minutes is usually the maximum. That gets the heart rate

up, then brings it back down. It gets the heart working on recovery. I've found that to be the most effective for burning fat and getting conditioned. Interval training is really best for functionality and improving your athletic ability.

***How do you keep your clients motivated?***

Without a doubt, variety is the key. If you don't switch it up and do different things, people aren't going to stick with it. If you continue week in and week out doing the same exercises, your body is going to get used to those exercises. The way to really build muscle the quickest and to get fit is muscle confusion, which means that your muscles don't know what's coming. My advice—and what we do with our clients—is to completely change their workout every four to six weeks, but we also never do the exact same workout twice with somebody. If we're doing legs, we're doing a different variety by mixing up the exercises. We believe in functional training, which means conditioning your body for things you're going to do in everyday life. Our style is not to beat the hell out of our clients. We want to design an exercise-and-nutrition program that somebody is going to stay with. If we design something that makes clients scared to come back, they're not going to stay with that.

***What is your fitness mantra?***

We do fitness from the inside out. You get your head right and it transforms the outside. That means having realistic expectations and making a lifetime commitment. You've got to move every day. That doesn't mean that you have to do a rigorous exercise every day, but if you get into the habit and schedule your training just like you schedule going to work, fitness becomes a part of your life.

---

*Blue Clay Fitness, 866.587.2583,  
www.blueclayfitness.com*

**Opposite: Blue Clay Fitness cofounder Rick Hagaman on the Power Plate. Above: Cofounder Andy Clay takes a client through a workout.**



**Mark Harigian,  
Harigian Fitness**

***What is your first step when you get a new client?***

I do a complete evaluation that starts with a personality profile. I've learned over the years that you can't just train people for the sake of training, because it's not personal and it doesn't motivate people. Training just becomes another obligation. I get to know if the client is a type A personality or not, because different people have to be motivated differently. The first step is to determine how to set the goals and what we want to achieve. Then I do a physical evaluation, which entails cardiovascular tests to see how fit the client is. Then I do a body-composition test, which determines the fat-to-muscle ratio, including measurements. If you don't have that starting point, then you don't get to celebrate what you've accomplished. Whatever goals we set are going to be realistic goals for a three-month duration. We start with three months, and if we reach our goals, then we reevaluate and regroup from there.

***How do you go about providing home gyms for clients who wish to take that step?***

This is a primary part of my company. I build custom home gyms just like a custom motorcycle builder. I actually call them "workout environments." I

realized walking into clients' homes that every room was at glossy-magazine level, except for the gym—it was like an afterthought. I make equipment for the client's needs, all powder-coated and finished in the same hues as the home. That way, when they walk in to that room, they want to be there.

***What is your favorite piece of fitness equipment?***

People ask me what their favorite should be, and my first answer is, whichever one they are really going to use. I've designed a small step mill for the home, which helps people go into their aerobic threshold. It's usually 10 minutes a day until exhaustion is reached. When they hit 10, 15, or 20 minutes at the max, they can't go anymore. The only way that you strengthen your heart and your lungs is to load them harder just like you would your brain. You can't read the same books and stay at the same level, you've got to read different books. Once clients can achieve this duration, I add a weighted vest—this is what I do with Olympic athletes. The load is heavier on the joints and muscles, so they're burning more calories faster.

***What difficult health or fitness issues have your clients overcome?***

I had a client who had been a dancer,

and she had been hit head-on by a drunk driver, which catapulted her out of the car. She had plates and pins from her knees down on both sides. She walked with a lot of pain over the years, and she didn't believe she could do a lot of things. I trained her aggressively, and she's never felt better.

Most people either baby injuries, ignore them, or just try to work around them. I have a lot of people that come to me who like to run and they are getting cramps in a certain leg. I don't tell them to go ride a bike, because they like to run—it's their therapy; so I go running with them and I look at their biomechanics. The way I correct an injury is by watching it in motion. What I'm finding out almost across the board is that iPod users often carry them in the same hand as the leg that cramps. That leg will get overdeveloped or start bothering them at some point. Think about when you're running and you don't have anything in your hand, your arms and your gait are moving equally. It doesn't matter if you're holding only a penny, that arm shortens. You fix it by looking at the biomechanics and by figuring out what you're doing wrong. You can condition to a certain level, and then you have to change mechanical movement and improve that. We often do videos of a client's mechanics and their gait. Then we look back at it. The more you know, the better you'll become at it and the more you'll enjoy it. You should know enough that you don't need me. There are too many trainers that don't give input, they just talk about something else besides your training.

***What is your fitness mantra?***

Fitness should enhance your life, not be your life. Too many people work out to be working out, and I say that's not living life. I find the things that clients like to do. I have a client say, "I want to try white-water rafting," then our training is going to get you in shape to be able to do that. It's sport-specific training. Life is full of compromises—fitness shouldn't be one of them.

---

Mark Harigian, 310.466.3297,  
[www.harigianfitness.com](http://www.harigianfitness.com)

**Theresa McQueen,  
Biltmore Fitness Center**

***What is your first step when you get a new client?***

I do an in-depth consultation and physical screening. During the consultation we discuss the client's fitness and physique goals, injuries, concerns, medical challenges, and dietary restrictions. My next step is to do a physical screening to test the client's stability, flexibility, and core strength. During this screening I am able to note physical limitations and areas of strength and weakness. If there are red flags, I will send the client to our physical-therapy unit for a secondary physical screening. If the client is extremely challenged or if medical issues are concerning me, I will also consult his or her physician prior to starting the training regimen. After this information is collected, I establish a benchmark to mark my client's progress going forward. Each client is different based on their goals, but I always establish a starting record of weight, measurements, heart rate, etc. This data, as well as the physical screening, is then stored and monitored monthly to see areas of progress.

***How do you go about providing home gyms for clients who wish to take that step?***

I will go to the client's home, do an evaluation of their space, and work with the client based on their budget to put the right units in place for their needs. Although there are many fitness machines to choose from, I always work with AFP for all of my purchasing needs. I have found that their commitment to price and service has been impeccable.

***What is your favorite piece of fitness equipment?***

My favorite piece of fitness equipment is the Precor Adaptive Motion Trainer (AMT; see Gadgets & Gear, page 30). This is a cardio machine used by many athletes, a cross between an elliptical

and a stepper. The AMT is suspended in the air, so it is great for your joints. It is a great upper- and lower-body workout.

I have many clients who travel frequently, so their gym needs to be

tube, inflatable ball, and pump in a convenient mesh bag, and the whole thing weighs less than 4 pounds and can fit in any suitcase. Every client that I work with trains with these items, regardless of where they do their workout routine.

***What difficult health or fitness issues have your clients overcome?***

One client that I saw the most drastic improvement in was a woman who was extremely asthmatic and had severe respiratory challenges. She was on five different asthma medications and a breathing machine, which she had to use several times a day. She was also overweight. Just starting her off walking at a slow pace for five minutes was a challenge. Through a controlled interval cardio routine and strength program I helped her get her breathing controlled and increased her lung capacity. I also changed her diet, and found that her lack of nutrition was also a contributor to the health of her lungs. This took a long time, but with a lot of effort and patience, she lost the weight she needed to and dropped her medications to just one. Most importantly, she achieved quality of life again.

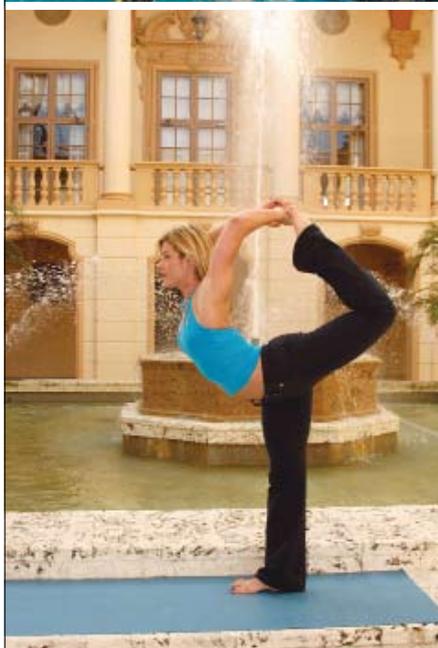
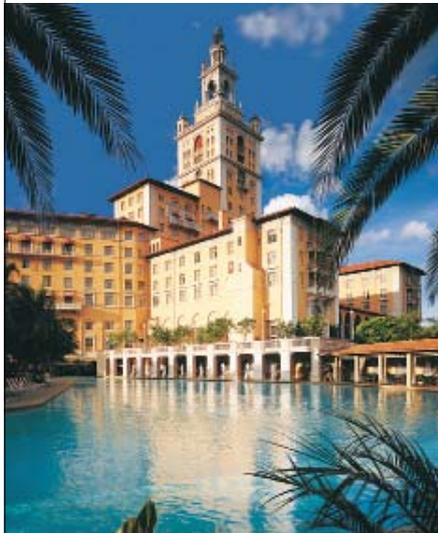
I also have a client with cerebral palsy. She is 28 years old and has lost about 50 pounds with me, but above all, she is a new person. She came to me nearly two years ago when her physical therapists said that she had gotten as far as she could go, but together, we proved them wrong. I think she has bigger biceps than me!

***What is your fitness mantra?***

Fitness is a lifestyle, not just a workout. And life without any challenges would be very boring. So when working out, one must set some personal challenges to break the patterns of boredom and achieve the next level of success.

---

*Theresa McQueen, 305.913.3102,  
www.biltmorehotel.com*



mobile, light, and easy to use. I also have clients who supplement their gym training at home. In both cases, I recommend a few core essentials; my favorite is the Travel Training Kit by AFP. This kit has a mat, resistance



**Joe Dowdell,  
Peak Performance**

***What is your first step when you get a new client?***

First, they have to fill out a health-history questionnaire and a couple of client-intake forms. Then I'll meet with the client and go over all of that information, make sure there are no red flags (in which case I'll refer them to the appropriate health professional), discuss their dietary habits—and depending on their responses, I might recommend that they see my nutritionist—and discuss their short- and long-term goals. After that first meeting, I'll schedule their first session, which is comprised of a body-composition analysis and a functional-movement screening. For athletes, I'll add in a few other tests.

***How do you go about providing home gyms for clients who wish to take that step?***

Typically, I'll ask the client how much space they have and get a drawing of the space and an idea for what kind of budget they have. Based on all of this information, I will make equipment suggestions, help with the layout, and even place the orders for them.

***What benefit do clients get out of your facility, which is quite large and state-of-the-art, as opposed to a more mainstream facility or a home gym?***

First of all, we are extremely excited about being named as one of the top 10 gyms in America by *Men's Health* magazine. At Peak Performance, our

trainers and clients have the luxury of training in a 10,000-square-foot, sun-drenched facility. We are able to provide our clients with a truly results-driven environment by combining top-notch trainers with the most diversified collection of training tools and devices.

***What is your favorite piece of fitness equipment?***

I love the Prowler. It is a pushing sled, which you can load weights onto.

***What is your fitness mantra?***

Train smart, train hard, and be consistent. ☐

---

*Peak Performance, 212.229.3670,  
www.peakperformancenyc.com*