

hapana

# THE FUTURE OF FITNESS FRANCHISE ACCORDING TO 7 INDUSTRY LEADERS



# INTRO- DUCTION



Running a fitness franchise today feels like balancing on a tightrope. Price wars squeeze margins. Staff turnover stings. Members expect hotel-grade hospitality. And everyone's asking: "What's next?"

We gathered seven industry heavyweights to weigh in on the most pressing issues facing fitness businesses today, collated from Hapana's 'Ambition Interviews' [series](#).



**PETE MOORE**

Founder, Integrity Square



**JACK THOMAS**

Host, Fitness Business / CEO, Base



**LINDA TANG**

Co-founder, WeBarre



**FRANCIS DOWDLE**

Chief Business Development Officer, KX Pilates



**ELAINE JOBSON**

CEO, Jetts Fitness



**CJ LEE**

Co-founder, Move Private Fitness



**KEITH KEPPNER**

Founder & CEO, Keppner Boxing



# Catching up to luxury hospitality

In a time where gyms compete on TikTok and recovery lounges rival coffee shops as third spaces, the fitness industry's most ambitious leaders are returning to a radical idea: **True hospitality is not a perk.**

For Pete Moore, Founder of Integrity Square (and responsible for raising \$1.1 billion in total capital into the HALO sector), success means knowing members well beyond their credit card info. He urges gyms to adopt a hospitality mindset and use [CRM systems](#) to track member preferences and assign staff "ownership" of members. That accountability means each employee is responsible to build real relationships and understand the needs of their assigned members. "Your member database is your golden goose. Treat it like one."

"I feel like sometimes people hide behind technology instead of using technology as a weapon."

## [Hapana](#) is a technical weapon.

That's the central nervous system of a club, the brain. But I can't run the brain without data." That data could include passions, goals, and event plans. Do they like pickleball? Do they have kids? Are they training for an event? These are all crucial data points that employees can log. Moore uses a company called Promotion Vault, which uses gift card rewards to incentivise employees that survey members and stay on top of people.



Luxury hospitality has been doing this for a long time. "When I stay at a nice hotel, like a Four Seasons or a Ritz Carlton (which I do very infrequently), they know what kind of coffee I like. Right? They know. Everyone seems to know your name. Almost like there's cameras around: 'Oh, Mr. Moore, how was your workout this morning?' I'm like, dude, who told you that? Somebody must have input it into a database on their CRM."

"They know what newspaper I like to read, what firmness of pillows I like, and how cold I want my room. Those are the types of things that luxury hospitality gets. In the health club industry, not so much."





Your member database is your golden goose. Treat it like one.



**PETE MOORE**

Founder, [Integrity Square](#)

Host, [HALOtalks](#)



Jack Thomas, co-founder of the Fit Guide, echoes this with hard data:

“There’s a quote that my co-founder, [Matthew Lavender](#), loves from Dale Carnegie: ‘A person’s name to them is the most beautiful sound in their language.’ And I think we overlook that. Globally, only 43% of the clubs we visited actually use the name during check-in. In New York, it was only 34%. It’s such an easy win – their name is right there on the screen.”

His wake-up call came from luxury hospitality’s playbook: “When we first dreamed up the idea of the Fit Guide, I was catching up with an old friend who works for Forbes Travel Guide. He explained how they evaluate five-star hotels – all the little things they look for. I realized fitness needed something like that.”

Jack points to Ritz-Carlton’s empowerment model as the gold standard: “Ritz Carlton gives their team the flexibility to spend up to \$2,000 to delight any guest.

They can’t throw this around for everyone, but it gives them the opportunity to create these incredible memorable moments that people will talk about, they’ll put on social media, and it’ll make them like lifelong fans.”

For both leaders, the gap is clear. At a moment where retention is one of the most pressing issues facing fitness franchises, hotels set a standard of member care that needs to be learned from. Jack says, “In luxury hospitality, if a guest shivers, staff bring a cashmere blanket before they ask. That’s anticipatory service – trying to predict ahead what your members might need.” In fitness, this might mean noticing a member hesitating after class and stepping in to help.

“Hotels train staff to ask, ‘How was your trip?’ or ‘What brings you to Barcelona?’



Gym staff too often don’t use names, even when they’re right there in the booking software. It’s a missed opportunity.



**JACK THOMAS**

Co-founder, Fit Guide



# Creating community that drives radical growth



It's 7:30 PM on a Thursday at WeBarre's flagship studio in Singapore, and 20 women are balancing in a demi-plié, arms trembling, as Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off" blares through the speakers. Half the class is singing. The other half is laughing too hard to hold the pose. By the time the track ends, no one remembers their quads are burning.

"Community isn't an accident," says Linda Tang, WeBarre's co-founder. "It's something we need to live and breathe internally first." For Linda, the alchemy of shared purpose begins not with clients, but with staff.

"We invest in our people - engaging them, bonding with them, and supporting them at work and in life. This internal culture naturally extends to our clients."

**The result? A tribe of devotees who evangelize the brand harder than Swifties defend Reputation.**

"Our clients often become our biggest advocates," Linda says. "They'll share their love for WeBarre with newcomers before we even have to say a word."





**Community  
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**LINDA TANG**

Co-founder, WeBarre



This investment into organic growth mirrors trends across the industry. Francis Dowdle, Chief Business Development Officer at our longtime partner KX Pilates, says this is his best piece of advice to someone managing a boutique fitness studio for the first time:

“Understand, contribute to, and participate in your community. Every studio develops its own group who want to experience the workout together. Fostering that and developing that is both a core component of financial success and a key piece of the fitness experience.”

As Pete Moore says, “When a member cancels, they’re breaking up with you. That’s on your business, not them.”



Understand, contribute to, and participate in your community.



**FRANCIS DOWDLE**

Chief Business Development Officer, KX



# Preparing for the future of fitness

The boutique fitness boom of the 2010s, with its neon-lit cycling studios and athleisure-clad devotees, is entering a Darwinian phase. Keith Keppner, CEO of Keppner Boxing, says: “There will be even more consolidation and clearing the field. I believe the client is going to demand more and more quality of service from studios and ones that can provide that will succeed. There is a big shift coming and a morphing of the boutique into another form.”

Linda agrees. Her diagnosis is blunt: “Right now, there’s too much supply, and it’s becoming a price war. In the next few years, only the studios with exceptional services and results will stay ahead.”

If the casualties are chains that treat fitness as a commodity, then the survivors are those betting on what Francis calls “accelerating differentiation”:



Boutique fitness can both support existing client wants and create new ones. The limit is only the creativity of those in the industry.



**FRANCIS DOWDLE**

Chief Business Development Officer, KX Pilates



Post-COVID, clients are seeking salvation. Elaine Jobson, CEO of Jetts Fitness, observes:

“We’re in very exciting times post-COVID, with a renewed passion for fitness and wellness. The increased focus on healthy aging, longevity, and recovery is helping us move beyond the aesthetic aspect of fitness. Like many others, Jetts is exploring our role in these areas, starting with recovery on the gym floor. This is just the first of many steps we plan to take.”

Linda is equally bullish on the recovery trend. “Cold plunges, saunas, breathwork – these are big right now. We’re exploring collaborations with recovery studios and adding self-care elements. Barre is here to stay, but we’ll keep innovating to meet our community’s needs.”





The increased focus on healthy aging, longevity, and recovery is helping us move beyond the aesthetic aspect of fitness.



**ELAINE JOBSON**

CEO, Jetts Fitness





Francis predicts boutiques will get a lot bigger. “Boutique fitness has a capacity to provide services that can both support particular wants from clients and create new wants; as such, the limit is only going to be the creativity of those in the industry to discover new modalities or new ways of providing established modalities.”

“To surmise, the future will be about growth through accelerating differentiation driven by industry creativity and community engagement. Something we are all incredibly excited to be a part of.”

CJ takes a more realistic approach: “I don’t have high hopes for the future of our industry if business owners don’t take the time to understand their people’s aspirations, values, and identity, especially the younger workforce, who already make up the biggest share of this industry. If we fail to hear out their intrinsic motivations and anticipate them by designing not just a career path, but also a culture and environment that align with them, then no amount of business strategy, capital injection

or client-focused ambition will be sustainable in the long run. Before we can truly focus on clients, we must first focus on our team.”



It doesn’t matter if you’re venture-backed or bootstrapped. The player who cares the most will win.



**CJ LEE**

Co-founder, Move Private Fitness



# Secrets to starting strong

Boutique studios bloom and shutter overnight. When we asked these industry professionals how to stay competitive from Day 1, the answer was out-caring, out-hustling, and out-thinking them. Their answers cut through the noise.

Open with fire in your belly - and 300 presold members. Pete Moore is responsible for over a million people going to gym in North America, and he says momentum is everything: "Open your doors with 300+ presold members. Momentum attracts crowds." But scaling too fast kills fledgling brands. So here's his non-negotiable: "Your first gym is your child. Master it before expanding."

That means living onsite for six months (yes, literally onsite): "Know every role, hire empathetic staff, and build community." Keith Keppner (Keppner Boxing) grounds this in human priority: "#1 is care about your staff and clients, #2 care about the business as its own organism."

Guard relationships like gold, but balance the organism. Pete's obsession with hospitality extends to data with soul: "Your member list is gold. Treat it like a relationship portfolio." Keith warns equilibrium is non-negotiable: Sacrificing long-term health for short-term requests means "no one has a job anymore and your clients don't have a gym!"



If you don't care about the staff and clients then you don't have a business.



**KEITH KEPPNER**

Founder & CEO, Keppner Boxing



## Stay humble, stay paranoid.

Linda believes in ruthless self-awareness:



Underestimate yourselves and overestimate competitors. Always have a contingency plan.



**LINDA TANG**

Co-founder, WeBarre

That mindset will keep you prepared and strategic.” Francis adds context and reminds us that early-stage metrics swing wildly. “Be patient, and be prepared to take the variations in that crazy time period into account when establishing a baseline understanding from which to work from.” Keith’s mantra for perfectionists? Iterate before you innovate. I was always thinking of a “better way” without even knowing a way.”



Iterate before you innovate.



**KEITH KEPPNER**

Founder & CEO, Keppner Boxing

## Hunt talent.

CJ Lee smashes myths about hiring Gen Z: “Stop assuming they want ‘time freedom.’ While it might be true for some, many of them are rather wanting to be empowered with the freedom to think and a degree of ownership.” This reframes hiring: “Your role isn’t to find clients, it’s to find great talent.” Attract recruits by showcasing culture and posting “content that speaks to future team members.”

## Depth defeats breadth.

Industry winners orbit one truth: compete through human obsession. Not tech. Not price cuts. Not ego. As Francis says, “Accelerate differentiation through creativity and community.” Out-care, and you’ll outlast.



# True leadership as seen by true leaders



## Leadership demands equal parts backbone and heart.

CJ Lee and Linda Tang diverge in method, but converge on this truth. CJ Lee uses time-tested principles, drawing from John Maxwell, Jim Collins, and Simon Sinek. For him, leadership is less art than applied science: “The use of philosophies and principles by thought leaders and books have been impactful to our company culture as they are proven to work for decades, and still stay relevant for companies big or small.”

As one example, all newly onboarded team members go through a 4-month weekly culture huddle for every newly onboarded team member where we connect them to our vision, nurture their sense of purpose, and show them how their role contributes to something bigger than themselves. “A great company’s culture doesn’t happen by accident, by convenience or

by the loudest voice in the room, it happens by design.” Yet his sharpest insight defies modern orthodoxy. Where others might assume complete autonomy is what their team members really want, CJ disagrees: “Though we assume that it’s the year 2025 and people crave for autonomy and no longer wish to be micromanaged... autonomy is something that needs to be earned.”

Autonomy without accountability creates chaos. A team member who hasn’t yet proven consistency, discipline, and alignment with the company’s values will likely mistake freedom for flexibility, and flexibility for a lack of standards. That’s when performance, culture, and client experience start to erode. “At MOVE, we don’t hand over freedom blindly. We cultivate it. We guide new team members through structure, mentorship, and expectations first so that when autonomy is eventually granted, it adds to performance instead of undermining it.”





Across the fitness landscape, Linda Tang's leadership breathes in the spaces CJ's framework defines. At WeBarre, she rejects rigidity in favor of radical connection: "I lead with my heart on my sleeve."



Understanding what motivates people and supporting them both at work and in life is the foundation of my approach.



**LINDA TANG**

Co-founder, WeBarre

For Linda, growth is a perpetual conversation. With peers, podcasts, and with her team. This is not a responsibility she takes lightly, and she constantly looks to level up her leadership chops. "Leadership is an ongoing journey. I'm always seeking inspiration - whether through podcasts, courses, or conversations... I try to listen to podcasts every time I'm in transit."

From Singapore to Sydney, the lesson is becoming clear. You can't ignite potential you haven't first understood; you can't sustain growth you haven't first earned.



# 62%

of fitness studios find it  
challenging to recruit and  
retain qualified staff.



When staff wages are the largest expense (along with equipment depreciation and administrative costs), this is no small challenge. Rising operational costs force owners into a precarious balancing act: cutting corners risks losing both staff and clients.

But with an unparalleled [80% annual trainer turnover rate](#), the fitness industry is far behind other industries when it comes to retention. However, this represents an opportunity for the savvy franchise owner: those who nail retention can pull far ahead of their competitors.

CJ Lee dismantles fitness's oldest crutch:

“Fitness studio owners have always assumed that the success or failure of staff recruitment and retention comes down to the dollar amount they could afford to pay out. This is not entirely true.”





The workforce these days are also seeking for a work place where they feel belonged, appreciated, recognised and to realize their fullest potential.



**CJ LEE**

Co-founder, Move Private Fitness



For CJ, retention is the sum of how well you can meet a compilation of individual needs. He rejects blanket solutions, instead choosing to work to the strengths of all personalities: “There isn’t a one size fits all approach... Some require a lot more nurturing, some love to be thrown into the deep end to figure things out while some thrive only when a well thought out plan and instruction is given.”

Personality tests become his compass - not to confine or define, but to create rails for growth: “It’s important to take the time to understand your staff better... Tests have helped us point our staff towards domains where they played to their strengths and thrived in their element.” Yet his coup de grâce lies in the tension. “Test results should also be used to make aware of how they could stretch to further reach their potential.” Potential, he insists, begins at the edge of comfort.

Elaine Jobson, CEO of Jetts Fitness, thinks in decades, not just fiscal quarters. Her warning echoes through boutique graveyards: “Ensure that whatever strategies you implement are designed for the long term. Many leaders know what they should do to improve their culture, but if these strategies don’t become ingrained in the organization’s everyday practices, they end up withering away.” She names the epidemic: “Leaders today face pressure for short-term results, but building relationships and trust takes time.”

Her antidote is slow, enduring, glacial persistence: “Focus on long-term cultural improvements rather than short-term gains.” Elaine embodies collaborative stewardship: “I see myself as a collaborative leader. I’m good at identifying people who are better than me and enabling them to excel while removing obstacles from their path.” But she anchors this in radical accountability: “Culture is shaped by many factors, but leaders have the most influence. I uphold our values and expectations...”



Nothing undermines culture more than a leader whose actions don’t align with their stated expectations.



**ELAINE JOBSON**

CEO, Jetts Fitness

CJ’s microscope reveals how individuals grow; Elaine’s telescope tracks why systems endure. They solve fitness’s bleeding edge: keeping keepers of your community.



# Secrets of the outrageously ambitious

Reflecting on his Harvard days, Pete Moore says ambition once meant excelling and moving up the ladder. Now, it's about freedom and legacy-building. "I want freedom to catch footballs at noon if I feel like it. Now, my goal is empowering entrepreneurs to reduce stress and scale ethically."

His Integrity Square advisory firm prioritizes founders with "integrity over profit," helping them avoid predatory investors. "If you're a viable company raising capital, I'll help protect your vision."

His proudest achievement? Equipping [every fire station in New York with gyms](#): "We were able to get over \$3 million of fitness equipment donated to FDNY. I got my badge here, so they made me an honorary member."

On his career: "I got money for a thousand clubs with 6,000 members. There are about 6 million people in North America that work out because I was able to convince somebody to put money into that concept."

For Linda Tang, "Ambition is so different for me now than it was maybe five or ten years ago."

"When I was in my 20s, ambition meant 'I want this paycheck', or 'I want this title', or 'I want this scope of work that made me feel like I made it'. But now that I have done my own business for nine years, ambition isn't an end goal anymore."



So how does it look for her now? "Ambition, to me, is definitely more about fulfillment - a deep sense of responsibility for the brand, the community, and the team. Leading in a way that is clear and inspiring."

"I want to grow in better places and also learn how to balance work with life. People don't usually say the word ambition and balance in the same sentence: it feels like a mismatch. But ambition - for me - is how I live the life I want and how I carry forward this deep sense of responsibility I have for the culture and the community."



The values are deep, rich, and alive for WeBarre and everyone interacting with it.



**LINDA TANG**

Co-founder, WeBarre





Jack Thomas takes a bird's eye view to ambition at scale:

“For me, ambition in health and fitness, in this industry, really means impacting people. It's really hard to be a success in the fitness industry if that isn't important to you. Let's say you're getting into derivatives, futures, or something similar. You probably don't really give a damn about that. It's just making as much money as possible. But in this industry, you have to care about impacting people. And for me, it's impacting people at scale.”

“I can do that through expanding Base or through getting out messages on the FIT guide, through having interviews like this, which will get read by a lot of people, and hoping that some people make some positive changes to their life and they get healthier, better and stronger. That's why I got into the industry in the first place. Fourteen years ago, I started as a coach, and I really loved having an impact on people one to one. Now, I want to have an impact on more people.”

“I love training our marketing team and our front desk team to be better in sales. So it's cool for me because I get to help. The result is that more people get fit, stronger, and healthier, and more people come to Base, but also they improve as well. They improve their customer service skills, their hospitality skills, and their marketing skills.



In this industry, you have to care about impacting people. I want everyone to leave Base in a better place than when they arrived.



**JACK THOMAS**

Co-founder, Fit Guide



# Numbers industry legends track

## Fitness studios can drown in data but starve for insight.

Keith Keppner and Francis Dowdle know how to turn numbers into tangible strategies. Their methods are different: Keith dissects funnels; Francis decodes context. But the endgame is the same. Metrics must tell the truth - or you risk the success of your business.

Keith starts at the start: “Top line is the top.” If revenue stumbles, he reverse-engineers the fracture to find where it went wrong. “If that isn’t where it needs to be then it is working backwards and determining how many leads, appointments, show rate and close rates based off of weekly reports.”

“Is it lead volume problem, a lead offer problem (maybe the offer attracts someone we don’t want), are we setting up enough commitment in the appointment booking, how are we at service and close in-studio to ensure we have a good close rate? And then lastly, after their first session, how well is the team for that location following through with them to help them sign up?” For Keith, ambiguity is the enemy. Numbers name the culprit.



Top line is the top.



**KEITH KEPPNER**

Founder & CEO,  
Keppner Boxing

Francis agrees revenue reigns - “Firstly, revenue is the key metric that represents success” - but he zooms out wider. Two metrics show the health of the engine, which are “conversion of introductory clients and retention of existing clients.” These are his litmus tests: “These stats can represent the improvement or degradation of an operations capability to deliver the product completely.”

Yet the crucial part of Francis’s analysis is in layering context: “These numbers exist within the key contexts of the fitness industry and the wider economic circumstances of the areas we work.” A retention dip during a recession becomes not so much a crisis as a signal. “Understanding the value of numbers within these contexts is a key driver of future focused decision making.”



# Make your business truly efficient with Hapana's software



Hapana is the only end-to-end fitness studio management software solution built to deliver engagement and growth for ambitious fitness businesses.

## 01 Create schedules

Schedule one-off or recurring classes and make necessary adjustments to manage peak periods, providing a waitlist for fully booked classes. Easily substitute personal trainers where necessary.

## 02 Personalize your operations

Whether you're managing a boutique fitness studio or a large fitness center, you can customize your app to streamline your daily tasks and optimize your routine to keep things running smoothly.

## 03 Create custom membership packages

With our fitness studio software, you can create custom membership packages to suit the needs of all gym goers. running smoothly.

## 04 Provide secure online billing

Automate the payment process for your gym community with our secure online billing platform, allowing full transparency of invoices, late fees, and overdue accounts for your clients.



**Get a tour of the software**  
- no strings attached.

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