



Getting a Grip

A VIOLINIST-TURNED-TRAINER TEACHES HER CLIENTS TO GET ALONG WITHOUT HER

There are hundreds, likely thousands, of personal trainers in the Chicago area, and Barbara Queen is almost certainly the only one to ever play Carnegie Hall.

She did so more than 20 years ago, when she was a young classical violinist in Manhattan. Though she also played in orchestras on Broadway and on tours to Japan, she had a lot of other jobs to make ends meet. Mostly she waitressed, then took a job at a health club. “I found myself inspired by the trainers, the ways in which they connected with people,” she says. “I got myself certified as a trainer but I nevertheless continued to shadow some of the best trainers I knew, learning from all of them, absorbing their theories and practices. I loved the violin—still play—but this became an exciting new career.”

She made the most of her mentoring and eventually became so popular—clients kept her busy 15 hours a day—that she decided to “escape health club burnout” and moved to Chicago. She married a violinist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and started training individual clients at various gyms. The word spread and, after searching for a space to call her own for more than a year, she opened Grip Fitness in January.

It is a handsome 1,700-square-foot facility just west of the Loop, filled with a few of the familiar contraptions one would find at the local gym but with a minimalist feel. “This industry is moving very fast away from

machines that are fastened to the floor,” Queen says.

Off to the side, on a wall above a water fountain, a flat-screen monitor flashes inspirational quotations. They come from writers, such as Anais Nin, and coaches and trainers, including Florida’s Chuck Wolf: “The big empty room is the gym of the future.”

“That goes to the whole ideal of what I am trying to do, to teach people that they might never need conventional gym equipment,” she says. “I see exercise as a language of movement. I am always seeking ways to expand that vocabulary. I dream about exercises; at least twice a week I wake up and put my new concepts down on a pad I keep next to the bed.”

The doorbell rings and Queen buzzes in her next client; she has about 40, and though she conducts group classes, she prefers one-on-one training. And so, here comes Max Eisenberg, a very fit-looking lawyer in his 20s who plays a lot of basketball at the East Bank Club. “I’ve had a lot of trainers,” he says. “And I used to use a lot of machines. Here I don’t and am getting a much better workout.”

They run through a few of Eisenberg’s exercises and movements (as you can see from Osgood’s photo). “What I am doing is creating a template for Max,” says Queen. “The whole idea would be for him to not need me in a little while, to have learned enough to never need a trainer.”

“That isn’t great business sense but . . .” Eisenberg says, smiling.

“I just can’t train people who make me grumpy,” says Queen. □
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