

BollyX® Spotlight: Interview with Fen Tung, Product Director of BollyX®

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BollyX® is a Bollywood-inspired cardio dance fitness program that encompasses dynamic choreography with the hottest music from around the world. BollyX® encourages each participant to “unleash their inner rockstar” just like the actors do in Bollywood movies. The fitness curriculum was created by world-class choreographers and certified fitness professionals to create a safe and beneficial dance workout. There are currently over 1,500 BollyX® trainees and instructors located in major cities such as Boston, NYC, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles. BollyX® also won the Harvard Business School award of “Most Innovative” new venture of 2015.

We had the privilege of speaking with Fen Tung, the Product Director of BollyX®. After our interview with her, we were able to learn more about the fitness program as well as Fen’s role with BollyX®.

How were you introduced to BollyX®?

I received my undergraduate degree in Biology from MIT, and was working at MIT when a friend introduced me to Shahil Patel, the co-founder of BollyX®. He was interested in starting a Bollywood dance fitness program/company, but his only experience was in the collegiate Bollywood dance circuit, not in the fitness industry. Since I was a group fitness instructor teaching Zumba® and other formats, I was experienced with the fitness industry and also had a foot in the door at several local gyms. Upon meeting Shahil, I was instantly fascinated by his concept – Shahil wanted to bring the community, fun and fitness aspects of his Bollywood competition days to gyms. While I didn’t know much about Bollywood dance styles (I loved Bollywood music though), I did know a lot about teaching group fitness classes, personal training, certifications and how gym schedules operated. Therefore, I joined BollyX® as their Product Director not long after meeting Shahil. The eventual product that was released in June 2013 was BollyX® – a Bollywood-inspired dance fitness program that incorporates authentic South Asian choreography to get you sweating, smiling and cheering while dancing to the hottest music from India. BollyX® classes are 50 minutes long and cycles between higher and lower intensity dance sequences that get your heart pumping. The company is based around the idea of a team mentality and encourages its community members to support the growth of each other.

What was your background prior to BollyX®?

I originally attended MIT to become a doctor, but quickly realized that it wasn’t my calling. I still knew that I wanted to help others in some way, just not as a doctor. Therefore, I spent some time working at a local gym because I could get a free membership. My responsibilities included folding towels and greeting customers as they entered the gym. I never thought of personal training as a career; I just

wanted a free gym membership. However, a personal trainer at the gym noticed that I was one of the only employees who worked out after shifts, and I actually knew what I was doing when it came to lifting weights. After observing my workouts, he told me he thought I would make a great personal trainer and encouraged me to get my certification. In that moment, I realized that I could help others through personal training.

What is your favorite part of your career?

My favorite part about personal training is knowing that what I'm doing helps people in a priceless way. I realized that, occasionally, my job is more about helping people mentally than physically. During the hour that clients are with me, they are venting, de-stressing, and talking to me about anything and everything that is on their mind. I'm the unbiased and non-judgmental person that acts as their counselor on top of being their personal trainer. My clients leave feeling better about themselves and in a better state of mind. Even if clients aren't necessarily losing weight, they leave their workouts happier, less stressed and not as critical of themselves. With regards to teaching BollyX® and other group exercise classes, even though there is no 1-on-1 communication like personal training, class participants still have that one hour to escape work to de-stress and do an empowering activity with me. I believe there is so much more to health and wellness than a number on the scale, and I love that about my job.

What is the most challenging part about your job?

I believe that the most challenging part about my job is helping clients with their distorted views on body image. I feel women are so critical of themselves – it partially explains why eating disorders are prevalent in today's society. Women look at magazines and celebrities and think they will never be good enough. Getting clients to think about themselves differently and in a more positive way can be very difficult.

What makes BollyX® stand out from other fitness programs?

BollyX® stands out from other group fitness programs because of the community and team mentality that it emphasizes. The founders created the program based on their college experiences with Bollywood dance teams and wanted to incorporate the team bonding aspect of it. They live by the motto that as individuals, you are nothing, but as a team working together to support each other, you can be amazing! In addition, BollyX® values seeking feedback in order to learn from those around you. Part of the BollyX® training program involves taking a practical exam to obtain your certification to teach classes. If a trainee doesn't pass the exam, BollyX® provides detailed feedback on what to work on so that the trainee knows how to improve in order to pass the exam. This culture of feedback only helps everyone grow as instructors by obtaining the required skillset to teach successful group exercise classes. Additionally, BollyX® takes feedback from trainees, instructors, clients and class participants very seriously as well. They tailor their programs and training approach based on the suggestions and constructive feedback they receive.

What inspired you to join the BollyX® team?

The main source of inspiration for me, when joining the fitness industry, was the personal trainer who encouraged me to become one. Personal training as a career never entered my mind. I knew it was out there, but it was never something I thought I would be interested in. However, once the idea was put in my head, I realized that I could find true joy and passion helping and motivating others to lead healthier lives. After becoming a personal trainer, I went a step further and obtained my Group Exercise Certification and began teaching fitness classes. Interestingly, I got my Group Ex Certification in order to teach Kickboxing and Strength Training classes; I didn't consider teaching dance fitness at all. When I discovered Zumba®, I realized I enjoyed dancing and began to teach dance classes! Becoming a BollyX® instructor and joining the team was a no-brainer since, by then, I had discovered my love for Bollywood music and dancing. Even though it took me some time to find my passion, I eventually found it, and couldn't be happier!

What advice would you give to emerging personal trainers/group fitness instructors?

My biggest piece of advice to emerging fitness professionals is to find a mentor! I floundered on my own for a couple years and never thought to ask for guidance from other instructors. It wasn't that I thought I didn't need help; I just didn't want to take up their time with questions or bother the instructors for help. However, now that I am an instructor and trainer, whenever trainees, new instructors, or clients come to me with questions seeking guidance, I love it! I really enjoy helping those who are passionate about improving themselves as fitness professionals. I also would advise emerging fitness professionals to not be afraid to seek and listen to feedback. In my opinion, it's extremely important to be open-minded and to learn from everyone around you every chance you get.