It seems unimaginable that some businesses would still be forced to close almost six months since the COVID19 pandemic began. In the beginning, it made sense to close because we had no idea what this virus was and we had to flatten the curve. However, once the curve flattened it made sense to open businesses slowly and have strict guidelines for safety and to record data. When done correctly in phases the curve remains flat while more and more businesses begin to open. Connecticut has proven you can open up and still be safe. Every action has a reaction, viruses and human behavior are not that simple. The longer the lockdown goes on, the more you see other things like suicide rates, mental health issues and domestic violence rise. Extended periods of isolation and lack of activity is not only bad for the mind, but impacts the immune system and overall health. While initially locking down was the correct course of action, many experts believe we need to pay more attention to the consequences at this point.

The majority of true professionals complied and even agreed with the initial lockdown. Truthfully, I believe even more businesses and activities should have been shut down in the very beginning simply because we had no data on this virus. Trainers and gym owners are not looking to risk their customer’s health and their own health. I would never even fathom risking my client’s and my family’s health to go to work; no amount of money would make me do that. I told my clients no gym and no in-home services until we see where this virus goes and what the guidelines are to open safely. Certified professional trainers have to adhere to the standard of care set by the industry educators, as they are representatives of that certifying agency. Simply it means, what a prudent professional trainer would do in the same or similar situation. This standard protects the consumer from negligent actions by a business or employee. True professionals adhere to this standard of care and always put their client’s and patients first. Our job is to help people live a healthier life, not hurt them. If there was clear research that demonstrated gyms should not open, I would not open regardless of the financial impact. However, I do think it is horribly unfair to close businesses and offer so little financial support. The PPP was not great for the service industry and did not cover as much as the public would like to believe. Businesses cannot be treated as a one size fits all, it just does not work that way. The fitness industry has been brushed aside this entire pandemic. How can Americans be expected to take health professionals seriously when the government deems us so unimportant. Even the gyms that are open are not making anywhere near enough income, so of course they still need help. Our landlords are expected to just give free rent; how is that fair? The government should be giving small businesses enough money to pay their bills if they are going to keep us closed. We cannot make up the business we are losing so loans just turn into stressful debt. Giving us the financial support we so desperately need solves two problems; landlords get paid and businesses do not end up owing a fortune. Many responsible business owners save money. We always plan for unexpected things that may impact our income, but nobody expects a complete loss. As an owner I have safe money in case I get hurt or sick. The difference is I am completely closed and I have to pay the usual overhead with zero income. Nobody plans for that and certainly not for six months of it. Even in normal circumstances in my absence the business still runs, pays for itself and gives me a stream of income so it really would not be so devastating. Honestly though, how is it fair that us owners have to burn all of our hard earned savings because of something we had no control of? Loans do not make up for all the lost business; we need forgivable money based on our rent, electric and insurance - all heavy business expenses. How many other industries got bailed out and literally some needed it after one month of being closed? If you cannot weather one month of being closed, then you probably should not be open to begin with. In some circumstances the government bailed out industries that were actually responsible for their situation, but refuse to help us when we did nothing wrong other than exist. Certain groups of people can destroy their industry and just get a tax funded bail out. Think about how many people that have government and similar type jobs that are still getting paid full salary to work less hours or none at all while nurses and other providers work more for the same or less money. All the talk about the extra unemployment benefits keeping people lazy may have some truth, but for the most part that money actually helped people like me and many other hard working Americans from spiraling into debt. While any extra money is appreciated it is a drop in the bucket when considering the huge overheads gyms have and that life in general is expensive. This entire pandemic just proves how few resources we put towards health and wellness.

My main issues with the closure order is that the decision lacks the relevant data to justify the claim that a gym is a dangerous place and there is no plan of action even mentioned for us. There is evidence to prove gyms are NOT more dangerous than similar businesses currently open. I do not expect a politician to be a health expert and understand gym ownership and management, it is not their job. Me trying to do the job as a politician is as ridiculous as a politician trying to be a health and wellness expert. However, I do expect the people in power to have the tools necessary to surround themselves with true experts that actually have real life experience in the industry they want to regulate. The fact that no experts have explained why NY gyms cannot open when over 44 states have gyms that safely opened is simply unfair. I understand that Governor Cuomo is a NY guy like me and back in the day anyone who trained at some of those gyms probably still have bad memories that stick out in our minds. While the industry has some issues still, it has come a long way and is getting better every day. The true professionals are essential to health and wellness. Our facilities and practices are not that of the prehistoric gyms we went to as kids. We do not pack people like sardines in dirty places with uneducated trainers, we are much more than that. The fact that CT gyms have been open since June 17th proves my point because the infection rate is among the lowest in the US, and continued to decline once gyms opened. As a wellness and education professional I depend on peer reviewed data, published experiences of other health professionals, education seminars by industry experts and my 20 years of experience when designing programs and making decisions on people’s health. I do not make decisions or publish material simply based on whims or theories, I have to prove what I say and do. As an expert witness I have heard the famous “everybody knows” line. It is one of my favorite lines because it simply means the attorney has little or no specific data to prove their claim. At this point there is abundant data and publications by reputable sources that conclude a compliant gym is no more likely to expose a person to COVID19 than any other business. As long as every facility follows cleanliness, occupancy and social distancing guidelines, people will be safe and improve their health through exercise.

Responsible gyms owners agree that following guidelines that include special attention to social distancing and cleanliness is the key to success. There is enough data and states open that prove gyms can safely open. Even if the gyms have to operate at lower occupancies than restaurants and bars to start, at least allow us a chance. Gym owners understand this is a process and have guidelines in place to take it slow and have industry accountability systems in place. We deserve a chance and our customers deserve to have a choice if they want to come. We are not enforcing cancellations and we are not charging people while shut down.

I truly believe that part of the issue is without a barrier of entry and at least some mandated requirements, the fitness industry attracts some characters that do not belong and make the actual professionals look bad. This lack of regulation is most definitely why our industry is suffering and is not looked upon as more than simple recreation. States may get tax revenue from gyms and trainers, but that is it. Other professions that require licenses and registration bring in direct revenue to the state and make sure professionals are actually qualified to render services. Many have fought to avoid regulation because they think it will hurt the industry. I mostly disagree; in my opinion some regulation is exactly what we need. There is a segment of trainers out there that make the professionals look bad and hurts our cause. The simplest way to start fixing our industry is to create a mandatory bi-annual state registration fee, maybe $100 for the first time and $75 after that. The minimum requirements would be a current accredited certification, $500,000 of liability insurance and current cpr/aed. For higher level professionals with more credentials such as a degree in the field or nutrition specialties, registration is the same except you must turn in the credential to prove your advertised title. For example, a trainer with a degree in Kinesiology would simply turn in their degree in order to use the title Kinesiologist. This registration process will create state revenue and a way to make bad trainers that do not adhere to the standard of care accountable. If a trainer behaves inappropriately or is negligent due to lack of professionalism they may have their registration suspended. As of now trainers really suffer no recourse for negligence because the employer takes the brunt of their mistakes. My biggest case was an over 10-million-dollar verdict for a stroke victim who suffered due to the trainer’s negligence. Sadly, the trainer just went and got another job at another gym and the new employer knew nothing about it. A registration system with mandatory insurance would eliminate bad trainers just like bad drivers. In my opinion it is about public safety especially in current times. Gyms can be graded on cleanliness. As an industry we would balance and keep each other accountable to our mission and our customers. With all of that being said, gyms deserve a chance just like the rest of the businesses that have reopened. There is no reason to force us shut any longer.

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