

## The Law of the Jungle & the Business of Fitness

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### Abstract

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Poetry can be an entertaining medium through which various issues in real life can be dissected and analyzed. Poetry can be reflective, creating understanding of various forces at work making things happen. Poetry can be motivational, creating a renewal in faith and generating energy and belief needed to overcome obstacles. Not surprisingly, poetry can be applied to the management issues in the fitness industry for any of the reasons listed previously. One notable classic, written in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, may be particularly instructive for anyone involved in teaching personnel management. *The Law of the Jungle*, written by Rudyard Kipling in 1891, is such a poem. Contrary to being a children's poem about animals, this poem is an allegory revealing forces involved in establishing and maintaining a viable business, particularly in an aggressive fitness business environment. This poem was used as a summary experience in a Health Promotion an undergraduate Fitness Management class. At first, the students were skeptical but as we progressed through the poem, they were surprised to see the management-nuances Kipling might have intended in this allegory on life ~ in a wolf-pack.

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### ***The Law of the Jungle*** by Rudyard Kipling

*Now this is the Law of the Jungle – as old and true as the sky; and the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die.*

The fitness business is a multi-million dollar industry the purpose of which is providing the public with a service for a fee. As individual businesses meet industry standards they are likely to be more successful for a longer period than those industries that offer substandard services or those that cut corners for profit. Granted, profit is the motive for the industry but profit at the expense of good, ethical business can be lethal to that business in the long run.

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*As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back – For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.*

Industry standards are meant to protect both the individual fitness business as well as employees of those businesses. External licensure and certification demonstrates that the individual is at least knowledgeable of minimum standards. Additionally, others will hold that business to their published standards.

*Wash daily from nose-tip to tail-tip, drink deeply but never too deep; And remember the night is for hunting, and forget not the day is for sleep.*

Keep track of records, receipts, external reviews, and the like because they keep your business on track. These records are the 'pavement stones' showing where the business was successful and where the business needs to change ~ where the business has been and where it is going. Charge what the market will pay but keep costs competitive and fair, focus on quality. Remember that there are cycles when business is good and when it is down; research, plan ahead, and be prepared to take advantage of new markets.

*The Jackal may follow the Tiger, but, Cub, when thy whiskers are grown, Remember the Wolf is a hunter – go forth and get food of thine own.*

During your initial growth phase, pay attention to the successes and failures of businesses similar to your own. Do your research. Find out why these businesses failed. Were there 'landmines' that others ignored? Knowing the mistakes made by your competitors and predecessors gives you the advantage in that market. Similarly, a new business may want to associate somehow with a strong, successful community business in the beginning phase. However, it is important to develop and protect some specialty niche to keep from being gobbled up by the industry with the greater resources.

*Keep peace with the Lords of the Jungle – the Tiger, the Panther, the Bear; And trouble not Hathi the Silent, and mock not the Boar in his lair.*

Alliances with hospitals, churches, malls and other civic organizations is good business, however, responsibilities should be clearly established and in writing.

Similarly, be discrete in courting the favor of those community organizations that may not be friendly to a fitness industry in their neighborhood.

*When Pack meets with Pack in the Jungle, and neither will go from the trail, Lie down till the leaders have spoken – it may be fair words shall prevail.*

In case of competition with another fitness business in your area insist that your employees resist the temptation to slam the reputation of the other business within earshot of your clients. It may be that, once you know the direction the other fitness business is taking, you may find a market that they are either not penetrating or they have no interest in it, yet. In this case, both of you benefit. Be ready to share (a market) but be reluctant to give up (your share of a market).

*When ye fight with a Wolf of the Pack, ye must fight him alone and afar, Lest others take part in the quarrel, and the Pack be diminished by war.*

There will always be legitimate struggle between individual businesses but litigation between competitors, if it comes to that, should take part in court and not on the street, or in the local newspapers, or in the locker-room. Many good reputations have been irreparably harmed by thoughtless words spoken in the heat of an argument.

*The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, and where he has made him his home, not even the Head Wolf may enter, not even the Council may come.*

*The Lair of the Wolf is his refuge, but where he has digged it too plain, The Council shall send him a message, and so he shall change it again.*

Your fitness business is, quite simply, your business. However, if your business puts other similar businesses in jeopardy, licensing and accreditation authorities, including building inspectors, food inspectors and the like, may descend on you like flies! In other words, the word gets around that your business is substandard. Not only will your clients begin leaving but the unnecessary expenses of covering up will reduce net profits, making keeping the doors open difficult if not impossible.

*If ye Kill before midnight, be silent, and wake not the woods with your bay, Lest ye frighten the deer from the crops, and the brothers go empty away.*

If you find a unique business opportunity, don't make it public till you have secured your interests. Similarly, work on the fine points in a business plan before you present it to potential investors. Investigate potential impediments to a new idea before trying to implement it in your fitness center. A simple thing, like a harrowing demonstration of some new thrill sport with financial potential, might frighten away potential users / investors.

*Ye may kill for yourselves, and your mates, and your cubs as they need, and ye can; But kill not for the pleasure of killing, and seven times never kill Man!*

This is a free market economy and you are free to take advantage of it. Your business potential is limited only by your imagination. However, it is not a wise idea to incorporate activities in your center that expose clients to unnecessary risks. Remember, a lawsuit for negligence is not uncommon but it is unnecessary; a lawsuit for an unnecessary client-death, though, may be what kills your business.

*If ye plunder his Kill from a weaker, devour not all in thy pride; Pack-Right is the right of the meanest; so leave him the head and the hide.*

If a business competitor is suffering and his clients come to your center, welcome them with open arms. It would be wise to urge your employees to treat these new-comers with extra care and concern during their initial experiences in your fitness center. They may not only be disoriented because their fitness center seems to have let them down, but they may also harbor some anger. This unresolved emotion can be like 'Damocles' Sword' in that it can cut two ways; they may begin talking negatively to others regarding the callous way your fitness center received them.

*The Kill of the Pack is the meat of the Pack. Ye must eat where it lies; And no one may carry away of that meat to his lair, or he dies.*

You should participate in as many community-sponsored events as your marketing budget will permit. Marketing is highly important to the continued success of your fitness center. At these community events, your employees should be urged to wear the company uniform or shirts with company logos on them.

However, after the event employees should be urged to avoid wearing these same clothes to nightclubs or bars where the company's reputation may suffer.

*The Kill of the Wolf is the meat of the Wolf. He may do what he will, But, till he has given permission, the Pack may not eat of that kill.*

Wild-cattling for members or employees from other clubs is not a wise idea. Split loyalties in clients, or, employees rarely promotes long-term business growth.

*Cub-Right is the right of the Yearling. From all of his Pack he may claim Full-gorge when the killer has eaten; and none may refuse him the same.*

A new fitness center in the neighborhood is not necessarily a bad thing. Invest your interests in your own fitness center and concentrate on improving client relations and employee morale. Be patient and persistent and continue to focus on a good product, your competition might make a mistake from which you can benefit.

*Lair-Right is the right of the Mother. From all of her year she may claim One haunch of each kill for her litter; and none may deny her the same.*

Cultivate the cooperation of the females in your fitness center. Whether we may readily acknowledge it or not in this period of political correctness, females tend to be more nurturing than males and nurturing is an important marketing characteristic of your fitness center.

*Cave-Right is the right of the Father – to hunt by himself for his own: He is freed of all calls to the Pack; he is judged by the Council alone.*

Although you will find many differences in behavior between the genders, in contrast to the nurturing behavior, males tend to be very competitive. Take advantage of this behavior among your clients and employees. In-house competitions are excellent ways to market your new ideas and fun ways to keep everyone on-track.

*Because of his age and his cunning, because of his gripe and his paw, In all that the Law leaveth open, the word of the Head Wolf is Law.*

To keep it simple, the lines of authority in the fitness center should be clearly defined. Similarly, to the client-employee relationship that should not be breached, there is an employee-management relationship that is just as inviolate. This should be in writing and located in the employee handbook and on brochures available for clients.

*Now these are the Laws of the Jungle, and many and mighty are they; But the head and the hoof of the Law and the haunch and the hump is – Obey!*

When it comes down to it we have to acknowledge that we are all interdependent in this business. Business ethics and standards keep the playing field level for all to benefit according to their talents, initiative, and timing.