

For Real Sweat Equity

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A morning spin class at SoulCycle. Evan Sung for The New York Times

AS anyone in client services knows, schmoozing can take a physical toll. All those drinks, dinners and parties mean little time to hit the gym. So why not mix work with working out?

That's what Erika Wadler, a 35-year-old reality television developer in New York, concluded after countless lunches and spa days with clients. Instead of taking talent managers and publicists for shiatsu massages, she now pummels her clients with her own hands, at Mendez boxing gym in the Flatiron district.

"When you're dripping sweat and the trainer's yelling, 'Just five more situps,' it breaks a barrier," Ms. Wadler said. "It shows a different side of you; that you're willing to do anything."

Similarly, Mike Wassong, 32, a trader at Euro Brokers, used to take clients out for drinks or steak dinners. Now, instead of long nights, he takes them to 45-minute cycling classes at Flywheel Sports, also in the Flatiron district.

"You can manage to get a dinner on the calendar with a guy maybe once a quarter, but you can meet him once a week for a workout," Mr. Wassong said. Golf, he added, "takes too much time."



Sarah Siciliano, (center) sweatworking at SoulCycle, where she says, a spinning class is "more fun and more appealing to men as well as women."Evan Sung for The New York Times

Attribute it to shrinking expense budgets (a Flywheel session is just \$30) or expanding waistlines, but combining networking and working out (call it "sweatworking") is a hit among health-conscious professionals seeking a wholesome new way to bond with clients and colleagues.

"People love it if they can get in a workout and check networking off the list at the same time," said Trish Gubiotti Lynn, 31, an advertising account director for Yahoo, who takes agency executives to Barry's Bootcamp in the Flatiron district and to SoulCycle in Union Square. "Ours is a big party industry and my clients will say, 'I've already been out for lunch and dinner and drinks every day this week.' "

Spinning classes, in particular, are popular among the sweat-working set, partly because they offer a low-barrier adrenaline rush. Classes follow a simple structure, and because each bike can be individually adjusted, it's easy to save face.

"People are tired of boozing it up with clients," said Julie Rice, 41, a founder of SoulCycle, who has seen an uptick in corporate entertaining in the last year. "Businesses are looking to engage their clients in new and healthy ways."

Sarah Siciliano, 29, a business developer for an animation company in New York, used to take clients to a toning workout at Exhale Spa in the meatpacking district, but prefers SoulCycle because spinning classes are "more fun and more appealing to men as well as women," she said.



Ms. Siciliano.Evan Sung for The New York Times

She also had an ulterior motive. Ms. Siciliano had trouble getting to her 7 a.m. cycling class in Union Square, partly from too many nights out with clients. She could push the workout to 8 a.m., she realized, if she took clients with her. "I could get in my workout, get into the office a bit late, and it's all legitimate," she said.

To persuade her dubious clients, including advertising types she calls "hipsters who love beer and chicken wings," she told them it was like clubbing. "If you like going to a nightclub, it's like that but drinking water," she told them, emphasizing the pulsing music, dim lighting and adrenaline rush. "Now it's like a fad. People want to know how they can get in."

Ms. Siciliano now blocks out 15 bicycles at SoulCycle every week, for \$35 each. "It's gotten me business," she said. "People feel good about themselves and associate me with that."

Some of her clients agree. "It really sets you up for the day," said Kiyon Spencer, 28, who produces television commercials. Is he more likely to give her business? "You make better decisions after spinning than you would after drinking," he said, laughing.

Keith Ferrazzi, 45, an author of "Never Eat Alone" (Crown Business), a how-to book on networking, argues that workouts are ideal for closing deals and winning accounts. "In the sales process you want to accelerate personal relationships," Mr. Ferrazzi said. "Vulnerability yields intimacy. Intimacy yields trust."



Mike Wassong, in cap in center, in a class at Flywheel Sports. Marcus Yam for The New York Times

Sweat working also raises new etiquette questions, like how to dress. "It's not the time to wear mesh shorts and my college T-shirt," said Ms. Lynn of Yahoo, who prefers "modest" black leggings. Nora Milch, the associate accessories editor of *W* magazine, has specific labels in mind. "No Target workout pants," she said. "I definitely save my Lululemon for clients."

Then there is the issue of being undressed. Those who fear the naked truths of the locker room take note: "I've had some of my best conversations while changing," said Loren Bassett, 41, a real estate agent with Corcoran. Ms. Bassett credits the intimacy of yoga and the locker room with winning her at least six clients.

Intimacy is also fueled by the absence of cellphones. Dan Gluck, 33, a founder of Health Warrior, which makes chia seed snack bars, organizes dawn workouts in Central Park with a bunch of Wall Street buddies. It is one of the rare times, he said, when he gets the full attention of potential investors. "No one's taking calls at 5:45 a.m.," he said. "And no one even brings a BlackBerry because there's no place to put it."

Not everyone, of course, is physically able, or willing, to do push-ups in Central Park, or bike continuously for 45 minutes. In those cases, it is up to the seasoned sweat worker to come up with alternative forms of exercise.

Ms. Siciliano said she had a client who once ran out of class and vomited, explaining that she hadn't exercised in a year. So Ms. Siciliano began having sweat-working sessions at a Jivamukti yoga studio in Union Square, where that client joins her for sun salutations.

"She told me the next job she has is mine," Ms. Siciliano said.