

Scripted Starts and Flawless Finales Part 2

John Macgowan: Hi and welcome to another episode of the, “Indoor Cycle Instructor podcast” I am John Macgowan. In a previous episode, I had the pleasure of interviewing the 2012 winner of Can-Fit-Pro International Presenter of The Year Award, Lawrence Biscontini. And he has joined me again now to go over the second half of his article, “Scripted Starts and Flawless Finales”. We spent a half an hour discussing his ideas on how you can improve your class and the communication with your students and members by really scripting out your initial introduction. Now we are going to go to the back half of it and discuss the “flawless finales”. So Lawrence welcome back!



Lawrence Biscontini: Thank you so much, so excited to be here and I am looking forward to chatting on the second half of our, sort of two-parter.

John Macgowan: There is a reason you feel strongly that instructors need to really script out the introduction and end of their class and that is...

Lawrence Biscontini: That research tells us John, people will always remember the first five minutes and the last five minutes of every experience or personal training session that they attend. They always remember how it began and always remember how it ends and that’s what they take away with them, and that’s what we generally least put our time, attention, detail and practice into, we get so worried about what we are going to do in the body of our experience that the most important for memory recall and customer service is what we don’t often practise. So the more often that we are scripted and rehearsed, the better it will be in terms of “Customer service”, “Takeaway” and also “Member retention” and “overall popularity” and “professionalism”.

John Macgowan: Wow! It sounds like you said that once before.

Lawrence Biscontini: I am not sure.

John Macgowan: One thing that did not come to me in our earlier interview is that, having this, both the intro and the outro, I guess they would call it in the radio lingo, is that if it is scripted then you can concentrate on the middle.

Lawrence Biscontini: Yes absolutely, I agree. The more you have it scripted and it comes out, sounding natural but you are hitting all the bullet points that you want in the first and last five minutes in terms of what comes out of your mouth, heart and hands, I think then you are able to put your attention into cueing to what you see then and really create an experience for the people in front of you, not from a book or DVD or magazine

that someone gave to you saying, “You must produce this experience”. That is generally beautiful and it generally works,

However, it is important to be able to cue what you see in front of you and I have to reiterate that all this about “starts and finishes” is really appropriate for personal trainers as well, because they are teaching - they are just teaching one or two people at a time. The five minutes at the beginning and the five minutes at the end should be no less scripted and rehearsed and flawless for the personal trainer creating an experience at the beginning and the end. So everything we talked about in part 1 and everything we are going to talk about in part 2, even more so, is applicable to personal trainers.

John Macgowan: Exactly! In your introduction, you were talking about doing a bit of a tease, to keep people engaged, waiting for it and you just did that naturally. I am impressed.

Lawrence Biscontini: I hope so.

John Macgowan: Awesome! Right. Well, we have got some very cool stuff to talk about at the 28-minute mark in this interview, so listeners please hang on. Okay “Closings and transitions”. You are right back to “gratitude.”

Lawrence Biscontini: Right, and before I even address gratitude, if you don’t mind, I just want to draw attention to the fact that the section of the article that is called “Closing and transitions” may raise a few eyebrows, John, because traditionally we call them the “Cool down,” the first five minutes as the “warm up” and the last five minutes the as the cool down. But now since the turn of the century, when ACE and AFAA and a few other organizations have revamped their nomenclature in the books of personal training and group fitness, the words ‘cool down’ really are evolving to a final phase in transitions and the closings of the experiences, because people don’t just go to bed after class. When you cool them down, it is where you take their body temperature, you lower it down and they are not going to use those muscles for anything else, maybe the last class on a Friday night when they going home and going to bed, that would be appropriate to call it a cool down.

However in the industry now, there are more transitions. We are transitioning them from one way of using their body, mind or both, to another way. So they will go and take a cycle class after their body pump and then they will run to the showers, and then they will run off back to work, and they will use their body differently at whatever kind of employment they possess, or they are going to run and pick the kids up at daycare or sometimes they are going to go and heat up their bodies, sometimes they are not necessarily going to lower their body temperature, sometimes they are going to go and take a flexibility class, sometimes they are not going to stretch, sometimes they will stretch in the shower, because they are leaving class early.

So we want to make sure we call them transitions, we are calling them transitions because we are transitioning them from how they use their bodies with us in that

experience from yoga to kick box, for example, to what they are going to be doing the rest of their lives.

You could call it a closing, you could call it the final phase of your class experience or a personal training session. It is not really just a “cool down” anymore, that really if referred to the old aerobics terminology of raising the heart rate and then lowering them and leaving people sweaty and doing some static stretching at the end.

John Macgowan: That’s an excellent point, all in its self, in that, because just cool down, it’s like what does that mean? But by applying something like transition to it you can, again going back to it, it creates more purpose for that section.

Lawrence Biscontini: Right.

John Macgowan: I am going to guess it probably helps to keep people’s attention.

Lawrence Biscontini: Right. I think so, it keeps people and everybody engaged and it lets people understand that you are still going to do something for their body, but it might not always be cooling them down. With the trend of shorter classes these days, 20-minute and 30-minute experiences that people often take back to back, the end of one class is a warm up for the next, because people will do in one hour but maybe it’s a 30-minute express avid back and core and then a 30-minute strength class. Well, the last five minutes of one are the warm up for the next five minutes of the next, because people might take that whole hour, so cooling down, is not cooling down at all. It is just dating ourselves if we keep using that terminology.

John Macgowan: Okay! Gratitude.

Lawrence Biscontini: I think it is important, as we do at the beginning, “Hey, thanks for coming today” to give them some form of terminology that fits your personality and the demographics so they know that you are thanking them for having survived the whole experience with you, whether it was breathing, the cardio killer, combat kick box.

It is important to thank them for two reasons, one, it is wonderful customer service, “You have made it to the end and I am grateful” but two, look at yourself and give yourself a pat on the back and thank yourself so are helping them look within in that mind, body.

Give yourself that metaphorical pat on the back because for whatever reason, you made it through. So you are a more empowered, stronger individual, perhaps leaner than you were an hour ago. And when we give them that, you help underline what we are doing in terms of customer service and helping them look at themselves and understand why they need you.

John Macgowan: Then you are suggesting people transition to making “you” statements.

Lawrence Biscontini: I think it is important to make the class personal, make it be an experience. For example, if you know someone in the front, middle or the back of experience, someone new who could not do squats a week ago or two weeks ago and you know that it is not going to embarrass her to say, “And I just have to say that Hazel or Mildred or Myrtle your squats rocked today.” She would just be beaming and the class might even applaud.

It is amazing how they already know each other anyway, so when you point out success stories, that is wonderful and you also can say things like, “You all brought it today, you gave me so much energy, it was amazing, I can’t begin to tell you what’s going to happen in the next class after you so inspired me from your energy today”. Whatever it is, “you” statements help personal that whole experience, whether it’s a “single you” Hazel or Mildred or Myrtle that I used in that example or the “general you,” in the second example I gave, the “you plural.”

John Macgowan: How do you do that without sounding contrived?

Lawrence Biscontini: Thanking them for coming, I think it is a...

John Macgowan: No, not, thanking them for coming, but the “You” part, because I have been in classes where the instructors appearing to try to do something like that and yet it comes off as kind of unreal, maybe I am not explaining myself.

Lawrence Biscontini: I think it is important to answer – do two things. One, see how your peers and colleagues do it, because it is always great to learn things how to say. When I listen to a Maureen Hagen from Canada or a Jay Blahnik from California say things, I learn what fits and what not fits my personality but whether I replicate it, and I sometimes do. I get inspired to put it in my terminology and I sometimes do.

So watch your peers, go to their classes or their first five minutes and their last five minutes. Stick your head in the beginning and the end, but tell them you are going to do that before that or else they will think you are rude by not taking the whole experience.

The second thing is speak from the heart. What did you enjoy about this group and then put it into a “You” statement. If you have nothing to say, then shame on us, we need to create something that...

John Macgowan: Right, okay!

Lawrence Biscontini: ...that it becomes a symbiotic relationship, so it is not always planned, sometimes when you think, “Oh, I am just going to be off today”, because I have got a 102 fever and I am not going to tell anyone and they actually carry you through with energy, we’ve all had experiences like that, or the experiences were over prepared and it just – it’s just lackluster and it’s just not so great.

We cannot prepare always those, but when you speak from the heart, you can make “You” statements, “You all did X, Y, Z for me today” and that’s just what I am saying.” You have to not make it contrived, but speak from the heart of what you’ve seen, what you’ve held, what you’ve felt, what you’ve heard. Put it together.

John Macgowan: Next, you recommend, “Making their day”

Lawrence Biscontini: Yes. I believe it is important to have something that moves beyond just squats and lunges, sweat or breath empowerment if it was just a breathing class, for example. Is there or someday that you could give them a ‘VAT” or a value added training to that whole hour. Maybe you are allied with a local grocery store, maybe you know a massage therapist who is looking for extra clients and is willing to give you 50% of discount coupons, maybe you are allied with a local lululemon because you’re part of whatever program they have for instructors to spread the word of lululemon clothes. Maybe you just want to buy a bag of candy and hand it out because it is almost a Halloween.

Whatever it is, I am not saying to go into debt over time by spending the salary that you make on giving them things, but I believe it is important to make their day; and I love, in a transition or the final phase to give some sort of value add that transcends a stretch. Sometimes it is just saying, “I want you all to make sure that you listen to this song on my website tonight that I am putting on behalf of all of you and how you have inspired me and how you make me feel right now”.

Just something that goes on beyond the classroom, something that they could take with them, whether it’s a thought “Oh! I need to check his website” or a coupon for a discount offer of all foods which I am not going to run away from. That says, “Hey! This is something I have done for my people”. My people I love are all the people that – “you come here and empower me, because I am always thinking of you, I have secured for all of you these coupons, I have secured for all of you this discount offer of this website, or company or something,” a friend is starting up, and then everybody wins and they think that you really care for them, because you do.

John Macgowan: Or an announcement of some event coming up.

Lawrence Biscontini: Absolutely!

John Macgowan: Because information on its own can be of value. The next component of your transition is “Transcendence”. What do you mean by that?

Lawrence Biscontini: I believe that movement has to transcend the classroom. Ultimately, our goal is to make every client class, clinic or club become a champion of living or a COL. Ultimately, the best trainers render themselves unnecessary, well that is not going to happen, you are trying to make them independent, not dependent. So you take one move that you have worked on in that class or experience, whether it is from yoga, to cycle, to cardio killer, combat kick box and say, “ Remember when we ‘fill

in the blank' tried to take that outside of the class today, in the following way 'fill in the blank'." For example, in a dead lift position, in a hip hinge where you are bending forward, hinging in the sagittal plane from the hips, not the waist, teaching people how to bend over. Say, "Remember when we did that whole set in the middle of class today or maybe what we are doing right now is we are stretching our hamstrings, that is how I want you to bend over when you brush your teeth tonight." Because ultimately, that is how we should always bend over so our spine will work with us for the rest of our lives.

You have taught them something then. When they just follow you through that whole experience, it is safe and effective and fun you are a great clown, monkey, parrot, mimic. Right? But when you have taught them something that transcends the yoga mat or the bike or the confines of that room, then you have made them a champion of living. You really affected their lives. That's to me is, how to define 'functional', something that they can use in their life that may not even be related to you, swinging a kettle bell front and back, for an hour.

So I think if you take one movement or one aspect or one squat or one breath technique or one sort of epic moment in the class, like if you are getting to the top of the peak of a hill, instead of just saying, "You are almost there, you have 30 seconds left, okay it's over. Before it is over, maybe transcend that out to the class room, like, think of something that's going on in your personal life and just as you can surmount it now. Recall how this feels now, and how it is going to feel in a second while when we turn down the resistance and sit down and recall that into your life, when you recall that issue, you are thinking about right now, "Oh my God" then you are taking the movement not from, going nowhere in a dark world fast and you are transcending the confines of that space. That is what great leaders of the world do in any discipline, you take people and transport them. So transcendence is transporting beyond movements, to life.

John Macgowan: And it can be so simple as cueing people to have a flat back, and then carrying that as they walk through work with their head up and eyes forward, something to that effect.

Lawrence Biscontini: Absolutely!

John Macgowan: Although I do not say it quite as eloquently as you do. Okay, awesome. Okay, so in the first half you were talking about doing a "Teaser", as to what's coming up, you are adding a teaser to your transition at the end.

Lawrence Biscontini: Absolutely! John. I think it is important to tell people why they need to come back. Dangle that proverbial fitness carrot at the end. Even if it is pre-choreographed formats, choreography, music and moves that aren't going to change for three months later, I think it is important to say, 'This is why they need to come back next week'. Maybe it's going to be they are going to get a coupon; maybe the focus is going to change, or the theme that we talked about in part 1.

Maybe the layout or the format or the structure of the class is going to change, but don't know how, Maybe I am going to interject some isometric exercises into what we have done. Whatever it is, we are going to do the sun salutation backwards in the dark with glow sticks.

John Macgowan: Okay.

Lawrence Biscontini: Give them a reason to say, Oh! Just that one eyebrow raise, "Oh, I am coming back", not by habit but also because, she said "we are also going to..." that 'also' makes such a difference in the end. You give them a reason to come back, not just tell them; because it is on a schedule and because you have been coming for the last 15 years, that is called, "Habit of zombies". I want you to know consciously why you are coming back because what I am providing for you is something that no one else does. That is what the "End teaser" does.

John Macgowan: Building class numbers is probably the number one objective of pretty much any instructor. So that is going to require a little forethought as far as understanding what that next thing is going to be.

Lawrence Biscontini: Unless you are using social media, then it is all done for you, you just have to tell people, "Visit my Facebook page wall and I am going to tell you what the teaser is and that is going to be important for the next class". Then they will go to my Facebook wall and it could say, "You are all populating the playlist for the next ride. How wonderful is that". Then it takes all the work off of me and they are all putting their songs and whether they match or not, "I don't care". The songs that they are choosing are on my wall, they are invited and they are interactive and their friends and friends are going to see, and their friends and friends and friends are going to see and it is going to grow and go viral and then I am going to put the playlist on "iTunes" on "Spotafind" it is just going to be viral. Or you could say, "Come to my Facebook wall tonight and I am going to involve you in the theme of the next class. Or your printable discount coupon, or not even tell them why, but you better know why and then have them come to your Facebook page and that's a teaser.

Something that anticipates that next class in some way. A coupon that I am going to be giving you, "see this picture? I am going to be giving it you out next Monday." Bribe them. I don't care, they are still going to come back and they might bring someone else. That's the teaser. Whatever the reason, it just should be ethical and legal, and it should be why they have to come back to class. It does not have to be associated with "Sweat" or "Movement".

John Macgowan: It is Interesting you bring up the Facebook page. This is episode number 234. I think back, and almost like in single digits where I talked about multiple steps to build your class and wonder which just at that time, that's amazing how quickly things change, is to create a simple blog to communicate this. But we are going to have to spend some time talking about the instructors creating their own place that they can direct people.

Now I know - one thing I have encouraged people is to use “Fitness Connect,” IDEA’s Fitness Connect in order to use it as a kind of a landing page that can identify class times and what not. But I like the idea of adding the ‘new reason’ to visit.

Lawrence Biscontini: Absolutely! You have to have a new reason to visit, social media is the way to build class popularity, it is also one way to look at using teasing and also the IDEA Fitness Connect that you mentioned, I have a link to it, a button at the top left of my website, so in less than five minutes people can get, not complete but less than five minutes get a free personal spot on the web for training and teaching that all organizations see, all the certifying bodies. It is real time, in other words, when you put in your certification details, it comes back instantly to say, it verifies your certification to separate the “posers” from the “pros” and it definitely helps you build your client base and send out emails and mailing lists and webinar information and everything that is going on with your clients, they can put testimonials. I can say enough positive things about this “FREE” did I mention that you pay nothing? “Free website”. Call IDEA Fitness Connect that you mentioned. There is no excuse for any instructor in the world for not having a 100% complete profile. There just isn’t.

John Macgowan: There will be a link to a podcast interview that I did with Michael Bannan from IDEA about Fitness Connect and how to get started with that. I do not recall the number off the top of my head, but I will add that in the show notes for this podcast.

Here is what I am excited about is, now you are revisiting the intensity that you described in your introduction.

Lawrence Biscontini: I am so glad that you are excited about that because most people are not, but here is the deal. If I said in part 1 that we are going to say at the end of how we address intensity, and I won’t go into it again all the ways we can do it, we want to ask them at the end of the beginning, an hour from now I am going to ask you, did you choose the right intensity that you needed today, for you at every moment,. Then at the end now that we are revisiting intensity in our class closure, you want to ask them, “Hey did you choose the intensity that you needed today? Did you all work hard enough that you needed? Did you choose to take responsibility for what you needed to do with every moment of our class today?”

Whatever words you choose, you need to remind them, because you told them you were going to, and pretty soon they are going to take responsibility for the intensity, because they are going to know. You are so busy showing different levels for so many people with so many issues, that you are not doing your own one level of workout. They have to choose the right level of workout for them.

John Macgowan: Amen! I am excited about that because that has always been my concern. You are looking out over your class thinking ‘you do not appear to be working very hard’ and they know I have gotten some grief from other people about that. If I

have kind of handed that off to them, in the introduction and then revisited it at the end, then I don't need to be concerned about it anymore.

Lawrence Biscontini: Absolutely! It is freeing. Because we can't take responsibility for so many things on this planet, least of which is your intensity. I am coming up with so many ideas of what is going to happen in that experience for you. I can't take accountability for your intensity and I can't motivate you either. I know personal trainers say, "Oh, they always rely on me for motivation" because one, they are paying, so that is motivating because they would not work with that same intensity if they were not paying, obviously. But intrinsic motivation is what really gives long-term goals, not short-term weight loss, for example. So we have to help people find what motivates them and keep their eye on that, group and personal training. Then that becomes their motivators and then ultimately we render ourselves unnecessary for that motivating, which is wonderful!

John Macgowan: I think ultimately the goal is to instill that internal motivation like you described, so that you can be there to guide them but ultimately it is up to them to choose how hard they are going to work. Oh! I love that, I love that, I love it. Alright! Then, "Purpose".

Lawrence Biscontini: I think you just want to restate the purpose of that experience so they know, especially if they weren't there at the beginning, why they came and what they focused on because they may be saying things like, "Wow! I was not feeling it here or here," but maybe that does not re-echo the whole purpose. Makes sense? So it is important that you just sort of, as you write an article in high school, the first paragraph is the introduction and the last paragraph is the conclusion. And we said something as lame as, "This article discussed the summary to my book report of reading the latest installment in Sherlock Holmes. Done.

You have got to do that. At the end of an experience say, "So we set out to do cardio cult today, we worked our muscles and we burned a lot of fat, so did we achieve it?" and then will go, "Yeah! And if they don't, aren't the kind of group, they are all going to go yeah!" you don't ask it like a closed-ended yes/no question. You just say, "Thanks for helping us achieve it today, you are part of our team. Whatever! You have to say what you set out to do, because you set out to do, specifically, cardio strength or flexibility or balance or breathing.

John Macgowan: Going through all this with you, it becomes very clear that you have to set it up with your introduction and then you need to close it, go back to the sales vernacular, at the end. And one does not work without the other. Does it?

Lawrence Biscontini: Right! You have to put it all together, and telling people why they were there, they will know that they have achieved a purpose. But if they are sore in their shoulders and it was a class called, "Lower body strength blowout" then maybe they realize, 'Because you are restating the purpose' that something was off. And then they become more responsible kinesthetically connecting to their own body and finding

out what is going on. Maybe they ask you, maybe they are more aware of their shoulders in the next class. I think it is important that you always underline the purpose for several reasons.

John Macgowan: Okay. One thing I am noticing that is actually missing here is, an opening for questions. Did you leave that off on purpose or is that something you don't recommend?

Lawrence Biscontini: You mean in the scripted start or the finale to say, "I'm available for questions if you have any?."

John Macgowan: Correct! Something like that. Is that part of it?

Lawrence Biscontini: I never put that into my introduction and conclusion and I think we don't have to. I think if people have questions they are going to ask them. I think if people have issues they are going to tell them, if we have the ability or the personality to say, "Hey! if you like my class, my name is this, if you did not like my class my name is this." Or if you want to say, "Hey! I am available after class," that is great, if you are available after class, if you are running to achieve something else, then you don't want to say that. You want to say, "Hey! I teach back to back at this other club and this is how you can find me." Or "I am always here early." Or "make yourself available but realistically available." I see so many Instructors say, "Hey! Tell me what you think," but they are never around for you really to tell me what they think. It just sounds nice to do it on air so to speak. So it is not part of my first five minutes and my last five minutes because it does not go for every instructor, It is not part of what I think makes up the building blocks of what is going to happen in that experience, because ultimately those questions are not going to happen, with in that experience, anyway. Right?

Sure, if it matches your personality I think it is great to say, "I am always reachable" and this is how you find me, obviously, look at me John, my website is nothing more than signed lines. So I always want to make myself available for people, plus the fact that people can't get my last name. So it is easy to find me. So I think as instructors you could say, "Hey! After class, if you are female, and you are in the locker room, I am around for you (if you are a female instructor, obviously) or if you want to catch me in the café, I always do an espresso after class. So whatever it is, tell people that, but I do not make that part of my first and last five minutes, because it is too difficult, too many people with our given dynamic of, "Show our teeth, drive away."

John Macgowan: Understood, right. Unfortunately that is the case, and yet as soon as I asked and you started answering the question, I realized that through the introduction and the transition at the end, you are actually interacting with your students in a way that it would be natural for them to come up to you and want to continue a conversation, if they have questions.

Lawrence Biscontini: Yes Correct! If you are doing it according to your own personality and it seems sincere, absolutely they will feel that you are approachable and

that is the most important thing, you're walking with the new star bucks, you're walking with the Vibram Fivefinger shoes, you're walking with a new shirt, they notice everything and they ask you about it. So of course, they are going to ask you when they have issues that are even more complex and are relevant to their own lives. "Hey! Do you recommend frozen peas or canned peas?" They are going to ask you.

I don't think that's our issue in this Industry, and we have many'. I don't think our issue is that the clients or the members or the quests are too shy about what they really think, I don't think that's one of our issues.

John Macgowan: All right. Lawrence Biscontini, I have thoroughly enjoyed our conversation and I feel that you have really done a great job communicating the need for both parts "Scripted Start and a Flawless Finale" and again people can find you at www.findlawrence.com. Before I let you go, is there anything else you want to add?

Lawrence Biscontini: I just want to say, "Thank you for this opportunity and when people start adding some of these steps in the first five minutes and last five minutes that they might not, remember it might make you feel uncomfortable at the beginning, but growth comes from feeling uncomfortable. Not from feeling comfortable. I have had a great experience. Thanks for having me on John.

John Macgowan: Oh! You are so very welcome. I love your comments. Listeners – to j just kind of let us - well one question though that does come to mind before I lose you is, is it okay for an Instructor to have these on, like a little note card or something when they go up on the bike or stand in front of the class?

Lawrence Biscontini: Absolutely! I did for years script for over 10 instructors at a spa in Puerto Rico where I managed in the Caribbean. And all my instructors, we had 8 classes a day and every class, everyone had a different beginning and a different end. And they were accountable for memorizing every opening and every closing and yes they had a little laminated cards, then we got iPhones and we transferred to the smart phones and dumb phones and then in some classes like yoga, you could stick it under your yoga mat and flip over and see it once in a while, and cycle you hide it under your towel and you are seated there. Yes absolutely. If the goal is say everything or remember half of it, I'd say, "Say everything and if that means you have to have it written down, then of course you have it written down. I am a visual learner in some aspects, so I like to see it and the more I see it, the more it will transfer to my long-term memory.

John Macgowan: Well again Lawrence, I thoroughly enjoyed this. Thank you for your time today.

Lawrence Biscontini: Thanks John.