

# EP55: How To Stand Out and Reach More People as a Fitness Instructor w/ Ann-See Yeah & Will Bremerton

**Will:** 00:00

The older that I've gotten, the more I've realized how much having a bit more humility about the people in the room brings a lot. And if the fitness industry is restricted to just people sort of 25 to 35, or or young, there's a whole group of people who don't see themselves represented or who don't identify or connect with the people that are leading the classes. So it was really important to me and with the brand that we're creating to appeal to people coming into fitness, but to provide a place for instructors that have been teaching for a long time to continue teaching, because there's a real place for you know, instructors in their 50s and 60s continuing to role model and show what a lifestyle of fitness is. Hey, it's Will and welcome to Group Fitness Real Talk. So we are coming off two of the busiest weeks in fitness internationally, we had the Elevate conference in London, which was amazing because we got to catch up with a whole lot of people that we haven't seen in person for a long time. And we also had Ursa in Miami in the USA, which was the USA's big convention, which was also a great opportunity to catch up with our friends from across the Atlantic, and a whole lot of international fitness people getting together in one place. Now we have lots of great content coming up for you that's off the back of those two conventions. But this week, we're doing something a little bit different, which is we are giving you a bonus episode, which is my interview with Ann-See Yeah that I did for a special seminar series she did for mindbody fitness professionals. Now Ann-See and I have known each other for a long time. We worked together at Les Mills, and Ann-See is an expert and yoga and mindbody. And she also runs the group mindbody fitness professionals, which we will link to in the show notes. This was an interview that Ann-See did with me. It was specifically for people that were attending that convention that were focused on mind body, but it has something for everybody. Ann-See is going to be running a similar type of convention later in the year, I believe so she is a great person to follow. I encourage you to follow her on Facebook and also to join her mailing lists so that you can sign up for the next time this series comes along. While it's focused primarily on people that are in the mindbody space Ann-See is an expert on all types of teaching and life coaching. She's a great person to follow. She's a great friend of mine in the industry. And I hope you enjoy this interview.

**Ann-See** 02:26

Welcome to Where MindBody Fitness Teaching Gets Real, the interview series on how to stand out from the crowd, fill your classes and reach more people. So I created this interview series having been in industry for over 30 years and seeing how hard the pandemic has affected existing instructors. But then also those who are newly trained, is become noisy out there, especially on social media. So I had this crazy idea of interviewing a range of experts and influencers to give their top tips on how to help you stand out from the noise. And by doing so reach more people and get more people to your classes.

I'm your host and CEO and it's my pleasure to introduce you to Will, Will Brereton. Now I met Will when he first moved to the UK we just worked out was 2007...

**Will:** 03:12

When I was a fresh phased youngster.

**Ann-See** 03:16

So he started in the industry when he was 18 and has held senior roles at Les Mills BeachBody and Class Pass. And in 2016, 17 he founded SH1FT, which is a digital-first group fitness format. And he also I don't know where he finds time, but he also hosts a top rated podcast called Group Fitness Real Talk. Busy, busy lad. So Will tell us a little bit about your journey and you know to where you are today.

**Will:** 03:47

Sure. So I started teaching at Les Mills in New Zealand at the Les Mills world of fitness because in New Zealand they're actually Les Mills branded gyms. I actually started teaching in my university gyms so I got the like classic tap on the shoulder from one of the instructors that was like, oh there's a guy in my class and it looks like he can do this choreography so I'm gonna get him up the front. And then about six months after that a friend took me to Les Mills and I did Bevan's class if you're a Les Mills person you may know Bevan from Body Attack, got hooked and then did that as my part time job at law school. And then when I graduated law school moved to Auckland started teaching Les Mills Auckland, which is where they film all their all their releases, and then started becoming a video presenter for Les Mills and then decided I wanted to do an overseas experience and come to live in the UK like a lot of Kiwis do when they sort of get a couple of years of work under their belt. So I came to the UK primarily to just work and travel and use it as a base to see Europe and the world. I was working as a lawyer Monday to Friday and then was working for Les Mills on the weekends so we'll be teaching a quarterlies or teaching workshops across body step and body attack. Did that for a good sort of five years. And then I actually helped set up Les Mills UK, when they bought out Fit Pro, I worked full time for the company for a year, got to the end of that year and got kind of headhunted by a Beachbody in America. And so took on the role of Country Manager for Beachbody in the UK. And was there for three years. So went from Les Mills, to working on the group fitness formats of the Beachbody programs like Insanity and p90x, which was fun, because I'd always been kind of involved in the choreography process at Les Mills. But I really got to be involved in creating the group fitness formats for those classes, was there for sort of three and a half, four years, Beachbody decided they were going to double down on growing in American and I was based in the UK and didn't really want to move across there. So I decided I was going to set up my own thing. So in 2016, decided that I was going to set up a digital first instructor format, learning from all the things that I thought that it's not to say that Les Mills and Beachbody got wrong, it's more the things that had changed. That meant that their models were I thought a little bit outdated. So releasing things only every quarter when people expect things more constantly, sending out DVDs, when everything could be delivered straight to your phone. And so I created shift with the idea of making it. It was a bodyweight format, because that's that's sort of my background is bodyweight high intensity of making its high quality, but really low cost for instructors. So cutting out all of the things that are expensive, like physical production and lots of members of staff, and allowing people to teach license free just like Zumba. But with material that was delivered to their phone every month. And we did that in 2017. And I have to admit, people didn't really get it. And the reason they didn't get it is because instructors still were really focused on they didn't understand sort of where they are the notes, I want to print out the notes. I'm like, you don't need to print out the notes because it's all delivered to an app and you can use the app directly in front of you. And I was a little bit, I will say, a

little bit ahead of my time only because when the pandemic hits, everybody had to upskill themselves on, on virtual on digital on technical skills, and everyone started living on their cell phone, their tablet and their computer. And at that point, everybody kinda went, Oh, wow, you've solved all these problems. And I was like I solved them three years ago. I'm sorry that it's taken this circumstance to help you to know. But it's, it's good that people have kind of been pushed along into the digital revolution. So we started with bodyweight, we added strength in 2018. So a couple of years into our life as an instructor brand. And then during the pandemic in 2020, we added functional step and M1ND which I'll talk more about. And we just launched, R1DE. So we have five formats. And we're very soon about to launch our multi format membership. So it'll be the basically the what we think is the first and only multi genre. Instructor membership. And I can't tell you the price, because this might go out before ready to launch our website, but it is extremely cheap. And that that comes from me being an instructor for 20 years, pays up pay isn't going up. I mean, we all complain about it

**Ann-See 08:20**  
down. Yeah, he

**Will: 08:22**

is going down. I mean, you take into account inflation and other costs that have come in. So it's really important for me and for us as a business to keep the cost low. And to be able to give instructors maximum ability to teach in as many places as possible. So there's no restrictions license included, they can teach online, digital or live in person with no restrictions. So that's a whistle stop tour through through what SH1FT Fitness is.

**Ann-See 08:50**

So, what so you so you were there are a lot of listeners, who perhaps you like you used to be where you got a job, and then you're teaching some classes in the evenings or the weekends. Right. And some was probably still doing that now. Others have, you know, kind of at some point given up their day job to do fitness full time. What was the catalyst for you like to have that shift from like teaching classes to now having a brand and a business?

**Will: 09:24**

Yes, good question. So controversial opinion. I don't think it's best practice for instructors to be just instructors. That doesn't mean that they can't work in the fitness industry full time. But I think that that's something that I really noticed when I came from New Zealand to the UK that I felt was something that wasn't best serving the people in the UK was that there were so many instructors here who were teaching full time. You know, up to 20-25 classes a week and just constantly tired and not really enjoying it. In New Zealand it is a fun part time job. Often it will be be appended to like a job as a PT. But if you look at Les Mills Auckland back when I started teaching even the people on the on the masterclasses that were getting sent out around the world, people like Donna McChord and others, they were graphic designers during the day or doctors and so like teaching was their hobby turned into a passion turned into a part time job. And often it was the thing that really helped them identify with what they loved and their real passion. But it wasn't something that they invested everything in. And I think that that was helpful, because it can often be low paid. And because there are people like me who do it as a hobby with a full time job outside of it like I was, that is honestly just going to always depress the amount that people can earn. Maybe a little bit less when it comes to specialities like yoga, and you will be you will know much more about this. But for a classic kind of change in group fitness class, there's lots of people who are doing it for the love, not for the money. And unfortunately, that puts

downward pressure on class payments. It means that if you are doing that full time, it can often be financially pretty much a struggle. So my view personally, and I still do this now I still actually work as a lawyer, just because I like I like doing two things. I don't want to be just doing one. My view is that teaching classes is a great passion play addition to doing something else, but I think it's a hard road. And it's all you're doing.

**Ann-See 11:29**

Well you talked about like they could, for example, have something else within like for me, I you know, I've got a yoga studio, I've got my own training, I, you know, I still do bits and pieces for Les Mills. And I do business coaching and I run business masterminds.

**Will: 11:48**

Exactly.

**Ann-See 11:48**

But they're all within the same...

**Will: 11:50**

Yeah, it's not the it's not that being in the fitness industry full time was a bad thing. I think it's that if you're only taking income from group fitness classes, it's always going to be a hard road because it's so much giving, and not a lot of getting when it comes to the financial side of it. So you need to like us that like if you think about PTS, who would use their Group Fitness classes as lead magnets for PT clients, or like you using it as a magnet for your business coaching or your one on one coaching or lifestyle coaching for other people. It's, it should be something that complements the rest of what you're doing. But if you run yourself ragged if teaching is the only thing that you're doing is that's my personal opinion. As I say it could be controversial, but...

**Ann-See 12:37**

I met an instructor once right, who at a, I think it was like a workshop or something. And she put her hand up and she said, can you tell me when I can eat please? And I was like, What do you mean? She taught 55 classes a week.

**Will: 12:50**

Yes. See, it's just as not sustainable. By getting into kind of why I guess the primary purpose of what we're talking about, which is more along than one body stage of things. The older that I got, the more this opinion has solidified because I want to stay being involved in fitness and teaching for a long time. And that that kind of 20 classes a week, 25 classes a week. It's just not a sustainable lifestyle for anybody. It's not sustainable for 25 year old, let alone for anyone as they age in the industry.

**Ann-See 13:22**

And I think longevity is so important, it breaks my heart when people have had to give up doing this because I think being able to change people's lives through through group classes is a real privilege. And but they've had to give it up because they've either burnt out lost their passion for it.

**Will: 13:40**

I've grown to realize as I get older and and so you met me when I was like 24 and was teaching the high intensity classes, it was all about like pushing as hard as I could jumping as high as I could. And I

loved it. And I think that part of the reason people enjoyed my teaching was because they could see how much I enjoyed it and how much I enjoyed, like passing that energy to them. But the older that I've gotten, the harder that is on my body. And also, the more I've realized how much having a bit more humility about the people in the room brings a lot and if the fitness industry is restricted to just people sort of 25 to 35 or or young, there's a whole group of people who don't see themselves represented or who don't identify or connect with the people that are leading the classes. So it's really important to me and with the brand that we're creating to appeal to people coming into fitness but to provide a place for instructors that have been teaching for a long time to continue teaching because there's a real place for you know, instructors in their 50s and 60s continuing to role model and show what a lifestyle of fitness is.

**Ann-See** 14:44

Absolutely. So I've had you know some of these interviews some some of the speakers have come from a freestyle background. Yeah. And then there's obviously you know the the brands like yourself as one. How do you, what are your thoughts about having, you know, being associated with a brand? How can that help instructors at ground level with their profile? And stand out from the crowd?

**Will:** 15:13

Yeah, so how do I view this so, um, we we're a bit of a, I would call us a kind of halfway house and that it's not pre-choreographed, like Les Mills. But we're pre-designed. But we provide for a lot of personalization and modification within the content that we give out and shift. So if we look at minds, it's a mobility, flexibility, and mobility, stability and flexibility format. And it's really designed around the principles of if you're doing all these other modalities, you should be doing some form of recovery and mobility, it's really, really important as you age. And our instructors tend to be more along the lines of circuit trainers and strength trainers, and they don't necessarily feel comfortable with the body balance or mind body elements of yoga. So it's sports, calisthenics, Sam, who's the creative lead for M1ND, he's a ex-sprinter, so he's got a real athletic background, but he's also trained in yoga and pilates and various Les Mills programs. And the way I would view it is we provide the workout so that instructors can take what they liked, and do what they like and save the time that they have for actually building their brand, building their profile, and that getting money. And that's probably the biggest thing is that it's, and we kind of differentiate ourselves a little bit from other brands, and I don't want instructors to work for SH1FT, I want SH1FT to work for instructors or our SH1FT fitness formats to work for instructors. So if an instructor can use our app and our products to save themselves time to deliver a really high quality class that then allows them to spend more time on marketing themselves or building their profile so they can get money. And that's sort of our job done, I would say.

**Ann-See** 17:04

Yeah, I think I think that's that's the key. Because, you know, instructors, if they've got their own classes in the community, especially obey online, they've got an online studio, they have to be marketing to get the people in. Yeah, exactly. And if they're so busy, either creating choreography, or learning, it isn't, they've got no time to put themselves out there.

**Will:** 17:29

Exactly. This is this is sort of the calculus that I went. So I talked earlier about the fact that I wanted to create something that was low cost, but that my view was also that every hour you invest in teaching, you kind of have to split up what you're getting paid. And so we have a timer, and you can basically use the timer to deliver the class that requires a little bit of free class prep. But a lot of our instructors, a new

workout will drop on that 9am, they will do it themselves as their morning workout, and they'll already be able to deliver it because the timer sits there in front of them. And it's all plug and play, deliver it that evening. And it means that they can continually deliver, tried and tested, tried and tested workout design that we have used throughout our creative team and our testing process. But they don't have to worry about a spending too much time learning it. And be don't have to worry about delivering the same stuff all the time, because we've kind of got the content side for them. They're constantly getting refreshed content so that they can focus on delivering that content really well. And doing what I think is the most important job of a group fitness instructor, which is building healthy communities is what I think that the real benefit that instructors can bring to their communities to society as a whole, you know, as in things like diabetes and heart disease, and the NHS gets more and more stretched. It's it's creating health. And if you're someone that loves to choreograph, then you should choreograph your own stuff. But a lot of instructors don't really have the time for it. And so that's where I hope that shift fitness can step in, save them the time but still allow them to deliver high quality and, and have the teaching experiences that they love.

**Ann-See** 19:07

So where do you see now that we're coming out, so obviously in the UK, it's like, everything's lifted. You know, I was talking to someone in New Zealand and it's still kind of still,

**Will:** 19:16

Like mid-April, Jacinda just announced it. I don't want to age this interview. They announced today that mid-April, all restrictions will be going.

**Ann-See** 19:25

Yeah, so you know, so the kind of different stages. Where do you kind of see M1ND, you know, you've got a group fitness and then you've got the more traditional yoga and stuff. Do you see a place for MindBody Fitness, where we're kind of pulling those those two ends together? Do you see a place for that in the future?

**Will:** 19:46

Yeah, I do. I think that a lot of people are. How would I describe this? A lot of what we find about M1ND is that firstly, a lot of our instructors were too scared to deliver something that was yoga based or even something like body balanced because they're not flexible themselves. And I think and I've had that problem too, and that I wanted to create something that I would feel comfortable teaching, and I had to get over the impediment that I'm not that flexible. But and I'm not that mobile compared to people like you and peep and you know, fitness professionals that I've presented with over two decades. But for the average 40 year old man, I am extremely flexible and extremely mobile. And I need to kind of get out of that, get out of that thought pattern in my head and remind myself that the people that we're trying to impact are not the people that you might see on peloton or Les Mills on-demand. They're the people that struggle to get out of the chair in the evening. And so I think that there's a place for entry level styles of mobility and stability, flexibility work. And that's where we position mind, I will often go to yoga and pilates. I like that sort of stuff. And I see what we create as a little bit of a stepping stone to allow people who don't consider themselves able to step into an environment where they might feel it's a little bit too far too flexible, to unattainable for them at that level, and allow them to make their way from something that's slightly more accessible, they might be coming from a gym background, or a strength training background, and kind of bring them into a world of, of mobility and where they might

feel more comfortable doing a yoga class or a more conventional, not conventional, but a more classic mindbody style of class.

**Ann-See** 21:37

Yeah, I think I think, you know, like, over the years anyway, I think there used to be probably when I started in the industry, more of a middle ground Mind Body introduction, you know, into both worlds, either way, but I think that seemed we seem to have lost that over the years.

**Will:** 21:54

I think that like I think that social media has done a lot of disservices a lot of good things for fitness. And it's allowed people to connect to their consumers really directly. But it's done a lot of disservices too. And I think that one of those disservices is around the like trainers and a lot of yoga influences who are extremely good Yogi's will be doing these really unattainable poses that just turns away someone that thinks that they will never be able to do that. And, you know, you see the you see the video of a class in Bali, and everyone's doing perfect sun salutation. And the person watching that is, you know, they're sitting in Manchester or Sydney or wherever around the world, they are thinking, I really think that I need to do something like this to make my body more healthy and more mobile as I age. But I could never do that. And so you don't often see pictures of people being really bad at Yoga. But that would actually be helpful. Because there's loads of people in a yoga class like me, who are down the back, squatting, barely any depth whatsoever. And but knowing that it's good for me.

**Ann-See** 23:03

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you see the face of group classes changing?

**Will:** 23:10

This is a really good question. I think we're going through a bit of a transition. I think that like classic Group X is a little bit over. I think that the choreographed to music style of Group Fitness is probably a thing of the past, which I guess is something that comes from the fact that I haven't gone down that road. And I think we're getting into more of a middle ground where instructors need to be more, a little bit more like PTs than they used to be. And that I think you used to be able to like go to a group fitness class. And to be fair, this is what got me into it, because I loved the idea and stand on a stage and just like, deliver a class from the front doing all the workout yourself. And that was what you're expected to do. And that was what people came for. Now, with the advent of boutiques and with personalization, people expect more of an individual focus. So if you're a group fitness instructor now, I don't think that standing at the front and just role modeling an amazing class really cuts it anymore. I think you need to be able to really understand the different ranges of the people in your class. This has always been the case, right? But I think in the past, you could have stood up the front and just watched whereas now you really need to give more individual attention to people, class sizes, massive classes are really I think, a bit of a thing of the past. It's certainly what I see when I look at gyms, it's more about functional zones, the occasional large class, but the role of Group Fitness Instructor is to be able to deliver to small groups to individuals and then occasionally to larger groups.

**Ann-See** 24:44

I've got two questions for you. One is for me, like maybe it's old school, but if I think back to the, you know, like the early days of Les Mills, people stood out as individuals, right and and and I think even today, with the instructors on the ground who are not Les Mills, even if they're freestyle, how do they get to that point where they actually realize what is unique about them?

**Will: 25:16**

This isn't, so funnily enough, I was thinking about this very much this morning. So I've been around I started teaching in 2000. So Les Mills kind of went global in late 1996 1997. So I saw Les Mills go from being a New Zealand phenomenon that's spread around the world. And I know you were really early adopter here in the UK. But the thing and I think Les Mills, international would themselves admit this, and anyone that's been around for a while would admit it, the original Les Mills, masterclasses were built on charisma. And then when they needed to scale it, and to bring new people in, they started focusing on focusing on coaching formulas, and, like replicable ways of teaching. And you got to a situation where now the master classes that go out on these mills are examples of what to teach. And you can go to a body combat class or body balanced class. And you'll hear someone repeating exactly what we're seeing in the master class. The problem being that the master classes are now available digitally, and people can do them at home. And so what's the point of going to, I mean, no offense to the average instructor, but what's the point of going to a body combat class and you're just going to hear what Dan Cohen will be saying, but not Dan Cohen. And I think that that the the idea of personalization, and uniqueness is something that's potentially lost, because people want to want to replicate what they see the best people doing. But the best people got to be the best because they were themselves. And I think that's something that's often lost. Like I did an Instagram post today. And I was like, the the, like, the value of being able to just talk rubbish in a class and make people laugh, or is is really important. And it's something that doesn't get taught on instructor trainings. But I think of my favorite classes eve and being able to deliver a really good class with short, sharp and effective cues and using the music when you need to use the music and allowing the air to be silenced when there needs to be silence. That's all fine and good. And it needs to be there. And it's the foundation that every good instructor needs. But my most memorable classes are the ones that are a little bit crazy when things went wrong. And they make in their experiential, like if you think of you don't often remember things when they go perfectly, but you often remember things when they go a little bit wrong. And so instructors, if they want to make a mark and be memorable, they need to allow themselves the freedom to let let go with the flow and let themselves be a little bit more messy, I think provided that itself provides is that it's affected does not need to be perfect. In fact, imperfection is more interesting.

**Ann-See 27:49**

Yeah. I still get people this is years ago, and I was teaching I think for maybe for the first time with Cory, and at a live event. And I like I can't remember I think I said something about something being beneficial for your colon and having. And he looked at me like, What did you just say, but people still come up to me today? I'm the poo lady. You know?

**Will: 28:14**

Actually, I think I remember that.

**Ann-See 28:17**

But, but I think yeah, but how would you then how would you what would you advise an instructor who, you know, they've never done this before? Never. You they've to step out of their box and just be themselves? Yeah. How, you know, it's not easy for some people, because they've kind of almost grown up in a very structured environment.

**Will: 28:37**



So I mean, it's hard, isn't it? Because that's the ultimate question is like, how do you teach someone to be more themselves? I think that in order to find that uniqueness, and create some individuality, you can't do it unless you build the basic skills. And I think this is maybe where that conversation that I was saying before, where people are now too rigid in making in making sure they deliver a formula or a style. I think that the key is get to a certain point of understanding the basics. And in today's environment, that also means mastering like your internet connection and your microphone and making sure that you're comfortable with your in your internet interface, and your video conferencing and all that sort of stuff. Because it's not until you are in a place of comfort that you'll be able to let your individuality show. And so you need to understand your content, what you're delivering, understand, you know, the space you're in, whether it be the room, the microphone, the stereo, or the internet, and then you need to understand kind of what you're wanting to deliver. Once you've got those basics, you can just let yourself have a little bit of freedom. But if you're stressing about any of the basics, so if you don't know your choreography, or you don't really know what you should be doing or you haven't got your your room or your digital scenario set up. You'll be too stressed and focused on those little details too. Allow yourself to have any freedom and flourishing. Yeah, I think that's it. You just have to, you have to preparation is the key to being unprepared. That's probably how I would sum it up. You have to be prepared in order to be off the cuff and unprepared because otherwise, you'll be focused on the minutiae and not allow yourself to be in the moment.

**Ann-See** 30:20

Yeah, there are some schools of yoga that assess you on the script.

**Will:** 30:29

Yeah and like, this is what all that all that I say is, is my opinion, right? Like there are certain genres. Yeah, I mean, like, what, what's the what's the benefit of that? Right? Like, what is the benefits of having someone say exactly the same thing as someone else?

**Ann-See** 30:45

I don't get it. Yeah.

**Will:** 30:47

I'm very much of the opinion that there's no one way to do things. And there's no one right way. There's many, many right ways. And there's some wrong ways that are kind of fun, too. And as long as you are, the key for me is don't deliver anything that's unsafe, or, or like inappropriate or disrespectful. But if you're not doing any of that, then relax, have some fun.

**Ann-See** 31:12

It's only a Group X.

**Will:** 31:14

Okay. Because at the end of the day, it's a group fitness class guys. We're not curing cancer.

31:22

It's just a class. Right? Exactly.

**Will:** 31:23

And I think that people get way too wound up about what we're doing. And what we what we should be doing is just for the time that people are in front of us delivering something that makes them healthier, healthier, and happier. And if we've done that sweet, you've done, you've done your job.

**Ann-See** 31:37

Cool. So if you were to leave our listeners with one single action today, what would that be?

**Will:** 31:44

Ah, this is the same action that I always have, which is video yourself and actually watch it. It's the one thing that everybody hates to do. But it's the single biggest way to identify what's bad, what's good, what you can do better. So my my thing would be video, the next class that you do do it on your phone, you only need to video three minutes, choose a section of class and then write down. One thing you did really well. One thing you wish you hadn't done, and one thing that you would do differently next time. And if you do that, once a week, you will become an infinitely better instructor really, really quickly.

**Ann-See** 32:17

Wonderful. So thank you all for your time.

**Will:** 32:21

Thank you for having me.

**Ann-See** 32:24

Bye!

**Will:** 32:24

Thank you for listening. If you're enjoying the show, don't forget to subscribe for all the latest episodes wherever you get your podcasts. And while you're there, please drop us a review. You can also get in touch with me at [will@sh1ftfitness.com](mailto:will@sh1ftfitness.com). I'm Will Brereton and you've been listening to Group Fitness Real Talk.