

# EP56: How to Teach a GREAT Cycling Class with Sarah Stonely

**Sarah** 00:00

Know your style and what you are as a trainer, like, don't go to other people's classes and try and be like them. Be you, but on a bike.

**Will:** 00:13

Hello and welcome to Group Fitness Real Talk. My name is Will Brereton and we are here to talk about all the things that are important to group fitness instructors in 2022 and beyond. Today, we are talking about one of my favorite subjects, which is cycle classes. And here with me, I have an expert that you may recognize from our RIDE program if you are a shift instructor, Sara Stoneley, why don't you introduce yourself to our listeners.

**Sarah** 00:37

Hello, it is good to be here chatting to you about cycle.

**Will:** 00:41

Me too. I feel like we've been planning for ages, but you've had so much going on.

**Sarah** 00:45

Oh my gosh. Yes. That a lot. Yeah, so my name is Sarah. I am a master trainer at 1Rebel. And I'm currently Head of Brand Development in Saudi. So it's a interesting time, I've literally pretty much just taken the job. So it's crazy at the moment. But yeah,

**Will:** 01:07

Interesting. So we're gonna get to talking about your experience of the Middle East a little bit later. To give you guys a little bit of background on how I met Sarah. Sarah was a cycle instructor at one rebel back when I was the general manager of ClassPass. And so I was going to a lot of boutique cycle classes and Sarah's class became one of my favorites for a number of reasons, mostly because the music was great, but also because she was one of the best cycle instructors that I had been to. And we're gonna get into a little bit of nitty gritty about what makes a good cycling instructor and why I thought you were good and what you think is good now that you are helping to create the best boutique instructors in cycle in the world being a master trainer for 1Rebel, but I thought we'd wind it right back to the start and talk about how you first got into fitness.

**Sarah** 01:57

Okay, so I actually, I've always been into sports, and I've danced from the age of like, two up until, you know, when you're at the age you either go to like dance drama school, or you go to uni, and it's kinda like that decision of which road you take. I like left dance at that point. But I had done it right up until I was 18. And so I've kind of got the dance side and the sport side. But then I went to uni and did fashion journalism really through something completely different. And basically, I around the time that I went to

uni, I moved to a very small place in Surrey called Epsom. There's not a lot going on. I've basically went through a uni thinking, Oh, it's near London, basically London so I basically just joined a virgin active in Epsom to literally just have something to do. And then I got so into group exercise like I was that I was that person I was like, like elbowing people for the front row for Body Pump. I was in for the 5Ks. Yeah, so I was basically just super into it like I was, I work from a client point of view, I experienced like everything that like little addiction to group exercise. And then I went into fashion, did my three years, and then literally is as I think it was my third year. I actually qualified as an instructor myself, because I once I moved into central London, I was then working Front of House at Virgin Active Broadgate. Yeah. And the I remember the head of fitness or the head trainer, or whatever the title is basically came up to me and was like, because I essentially took the job right to get the free membership, right. And, and because it was like the top tier virgin active, I could go to all of them in London. So I was like, this is worth like two shifts a week. This is fine. And then she came over to me and she was like you do like all the classes like why don't you just teach them and I was like, I genuinely hadn't really thought about it and then she

**Will:** 04:29

Ah, so you out the front of every class and like loving it, but you'd never thought about actually taking hold of the mic and doing it yourself.

**Sarah** 04:36

100%. I had never even like considered that I just liked going to class. Yeah. And then it's so funny because that's one of the gyms that I ended up teaching at most and like people that I was in class with were now the people I was teaching and it was just like such a weird journey I guess now I'm not really thought about it until like right now. And so basically she pushed me to do my level two, did my level two, I had no interest in like going into the PT side of it, like I did get my level three just cuz it's good practice obviously, but my goal my passion was always GroupX for sure and then yeah I started working with

**Will:** 05:22

What was the first thing you qualified in?

**Sarah** 05:24

Spin, obviously. Indoor cycling and then I did like a really rogue kettlebell course, random, and then body pump.

**Will:** 05:38

Right and weird other connection to SH1FT Fitness, your Body Pump trainer was Libby who is our head of Business Development at SH1FT right? Yeah,

**Sarah** 05:48

Yeah I know when I saw that I was like, so funny.

**Will:** 05:52

Yeah, that's the fitness industry for you though. Like the people you meet, you run into back again. That's why you always have to keep good relationships because, you know you'll run into people over and over again.

**Sarah 06:00**

when that when I hear people like getting a bit beefy I'm like, don't do it. Yeah. Be nice because it will bite you in the ass somewhere we're like down the line. It's too small.

**Will: 06:12**

Okay, cool. So you were teaching various classes at Virgin Active and like, I remember when you when we first had a coffee when I wanted to recruit you into helping me with R1DE. You actually started a job in fashion or did you get an interning job in fashion to begin with?

**Sarah 06:27**

Oh, yeah, I interned. I interned at Elle. I actually first interned at InStyle. And again, fashion is exactly like fitness. It's kind of like once you're in it kind of just rolls forward. So

**Will: 06:40**

Okay, so two magazines, InStyle and Elle magazine. So pretty, pretty good opportunities for fashion students in terms of getting their foot in the door, right?

**Sarah 06:50**

Oh, 100%. And basically from I don't I also did some small stints at Women's Health and Cosmo, but like literally two week internships, my big ones were InStyle and then Elle and then after Elle, I basically was teaching at this point now like I've got into it. I just got a job at Lomax. And I mean, at the time Lomax, it's not even around anymore, but at the time, it was like it was a boutique. It was like the first, so like studio job I got.

**Will: 07:25**

For people that aren't from London, Core Collective and Lomax, sadly, neither of them exist anymore. So Lomax was actually stopped before the pandemic and Core Collective has recently been amalgamated into 1Rebel. But both of them were premium top tier boutique brands that existed in London sort of 2017, 2018 kind of pre pandemic when the boutique fitness industry was really booming doing a variety of classes that have that yes, sadly, they're no longer around but they the the places still exist, they're just rebranded into other things now yeah.

**Sarah 08:01**

And again, another really like interesting story on how the fitness industry is so small, the head of the head of cycle at Core Collective, used to work at Lomax so I've got Core Collective first, and I really wasn't there for very long because they were brand new, so they were finding their way. And the head of cycle at Lomax basically said to me, when I message them, I'm like, Look, I'm teaching cycle at Core, I'm going to be around, like if there are any classes, I'm into it. And he basically was like, okay, cool. Like the fact that James has hired you at Core like, I don't need you to do an audition. I trust him. Just like got another job because the person at Core had hired me. So it's kinda like, you're like, word of mouth is everything, especially in boutique like, once you're in that little pocket, it's kind of even smaller. Everyone knows everyone. So I basically got offered an internship, I offered fashion intern at Vogue. And I was

**Will: 09:08**

Okay, so, you got offered an internship at Vogue magazine, which I imagine is like the Holy Grail of fashion internships, like so aside from working in a brand that must be like the number one thing that people go for. So tell me a bit about that.

**Sarah** 09:23

Yeah, so I mean, I'd already started to feel like you when I was at Elle, like some of the stuff that was happening and I was a bit like, I don't know if this industry is for me, like I really love fashion I love like style. I actually really love like the history of fashion and that's and how it connects with popular culture and music. Anyway. But I just couldn't get on board with some of the ways of the industry. And when the best way to describe it is like you Devil Wears Prada is real. And I was like, it's even worse. Because when you go in, like when you're an intern, you're essentially like, you live in the fashion cupboard. Yeah. And it's essentially like a very small, small room. That is you has no windows. It's just literally like, floor to ceiling, wall to wall rails of clothes. And your job is essentially making sure that all the clothes are there for a photoshoot and then sending them back to

**Will:** 10:38

the PR, various designers and PR and stuff. Yes, yeah.

**Sarah** 10:42

So you're essentially like the mail person. Glorified mail. And, you know, when when I first started, I was just so excited that I was getting opportunities. I honestly didn't care. But then once I started teaching classes, and I realized that how it felt for me to do that job. Yes, I think that's what I should. That's how I should feel in fashion. And I don't feel like that. Yeah. Like the, you know, after you finish teaching, or like you connect with a member, or you know that a class was just really good, like that sense of achievement. I never really got that from anything I did in fashion. And I think that just kind of shows that it was never quite right. Yep. So basically, Vogue offered me an internship, I had these classes that I built up now in the past year. So it was about a year, slowly building like, I never just fully went straight in, I was just teaching like one or two a week, then three or four a week. And then they I was basically like, look, and also the pay for an intern is essentially expenses only.

**Will:** 11:55

Right? So they're basically like, if you're a Vogue, they're expecting you to work for nothing, just because it's gonna be such a great name on your CV in the long run and all that.

**Sarah** 12:04

So it was like 50 pound a week.

**Will:** 12:07

Oh, wow. Okay.

**Sarah** 12:10

That's the level we're talkin'.

**Will:** 12:12

People are thinking fitness pays really badly...

**Sarah** 12:16

I'm like, how dare you? Yeah. And that's like, that was gonna be like, essentially, that is not even your lunch in the centre of London? Yeah, for a week, you know, I mean, it's like, you get in 10 pound a day, essentially. Yeah. So it's, it's bad. And for the hours that they want you to work, it's, I think something genuinely does need to change in that sense. Because it creates this, it creates the industry that it has, because the only people that I ever came across that can afford to do that job, are people whose parents happen to live there,

**Will:** 12:56

or their family comes from money, and they can afford to pay for them to an unpaid intern, meaning that anybody that's working class from out of London is barred from the opportunity because they just can't afford it, right?

**Sarah** 13:08

If you're supporting yourself as a young person, it's off the cards for you. And then this is where it comes into what they said to me, they basically, I met a lot of people in fashion that were also working in like clubs at night, like they were behind the bar in a club, because that job would start at like 10pm.

**Will:** 13:32

Right, so they could do the long hours for the no money, and then they could go work at a bar and get tips and stuff.

**Sarah** 13:38

Yes. But obviously, like they were miserable, because they were not sleeping. Yeah. And they were just so tired. So everyone's basically either rich, or exhausted, or it was just like, so unrealistic for me that I could do that job, right. And then when I said, look, I teach fitness classes. And that's my job. Like, as just as other people are waiting on tables, or I was like, it's not gonna affect work, because I'll teach that early morning classes be done at eight be in the office by nine. And they will literally like, no, you need to be available, like, all the time, basically, anytime that we would need you to come in early. Like on shoot days, they literally made me go in at like 6am and pack a suitcase. And you know, I mean, it was just crazy. So as soon as they said no, like, you're gonna need to be available. I was like, Do you know what, I'm actually not willing to give up the time and effort I've put in building up these sessions and building relationships with the members of staff who have given me these jobs.

**Will:** 14:57

Doing something that's making you feel fulfilled at the end of it.

**Sarah** 14:59

Actually making me happy. And, you know, I was what? 20,21? It's not bad money for someone that age like, Yeah, I think what what I would what I was earning in front of house stay put to now what I'm earning per class is good. So I was like, there's there's really I would I would be taking that job at Vogue literally just to say I've worked at Vogue. And that's not me. So I basically turned it down.

**Will:** 15:32

Yeah, so Group Fitness Real Talk come for the fitness talk. But we begin with a class critique of the fashion industry and, and how it blocks working class people from having an opportunity, which to be frank is bullshit, and lots of industries like that. But that's probably a topic for another podcast. So we'll leave it there. We'll leave it there. We'll leave it there.

**Sarah 15:53**

I didn't even work in fashion properly and I'm here like they need to change.

**Will: 15:58**

No, but it's true. I mean, to be honest, like that, I think there are a lot of problems with businesses that require a lot of free interning or low paid intern because it's just not reasonable. Like as someone that comes from, you know, working class origins in New Zealand, too, I have exactly the same critiques of everything. But before we get into a long conversation about about politics, let's focus back on fitness, and talk about how you got into boutique. So I know you started working in sort of the big box gym and doing Les Mills classes, and stuff like that. And you've talked a little bit about how you transitioned into boutique. What was the main point of of transition that got you into the likes of 1Rebel where I first came across you?

**Sarah 16:38**

So again, it really came from me and it's funny, because I think every like, other than the people that I work with, any friend I've ever made in fitness is because I've done that class, or I've been at their studio taking part like I like to go and do classes even now like I go to other studios all the time. Like, you know, I've spoken to a lot

**Will: 17:08**

Except when you're in Dubai for that short period. No, comment.

**Sarah 17:14**

Yeah. But you know, like, I basically was even when I was teaching classes, mainly I was at Virgin active for a long time, like years, maybe three years, I was pretty much solely at Virgin active with a couple of classes at low max. That's kind of how it started. And then I was honestly like, I and I still look berries, like as a class. I have a lot of friends that work there. And I've my basically of my flatmate at the time, who doesn't work in fitness at all, we were just like, oh, let's go to a barre class. And I did it. And I just got so into it. It basically made me such a good runner like, and then once you get good at something, you want to do it even more. Yeah. So I really was like, I want to work at Barry's. So it wasn't really I want to work for boutiques. It was I want to work Barry's.

**Will: 18:12**

I personally have views on treadmill bootcamps. But we're not going to go there because we're gonna focus on cycle.

**Sarah 18:20**

Yeah, I was like, that's what I wanted to do. And, and then I had a bit of experience training to teach at Barry's, and it didn't work out. But that was when it then pushed me into other boutiques, because then I was like, well, you know, I know I can do it, because I even believed when Barry's didn't happen. I was like, it's not happening now. Again, I was 21. So, I was like, very...

**Will: 18:48**

That's the other thing I didn't mention, Sarah is probably the youngest member of the SH1FT sort of creative team and that I needed some, I just thought I needed some younger input of I wanted to make

a cycle program that had a boutique influence. And so I went young, although you're not quite as young anymore, but you're still young in terms of in terms of fitness, I would say.

**Sarah 19:06**

Yeah, I think um, because I started so early. For what I've managed to do in the years like now I'm 27. So, okay, I'm not really that young now. But you know, like, when I started, every team I was on, I was the youngest by a lot.

**Will: 19:29**

Believe it or not, I started that way too and now I'm the old man.

**Sarah 19:35**

I know. But the thing is, I act like an old lady. So no one notices that I'm that young. But then, yeah, so when viruses happen I was very much like, Oh, it's just you know, I'm young. I need to go and get more experience. So I'll just go and push to work at other places. And I ended up at, do you remember best boot camp.

**Will: 19:58**

I do. I taught there too. I taught spin at best bootcamp.

**Sarah 20:02**

Really? Yeah. I didn't know that. So I basically taught spin there was,

**Will: 20:08**

oh, we crossed over there. And we didn't even know I didn't teach very long, actually. Yeah, I just got too busy with other stuff.

**Sarah 20:15**

Yeah, I am. So I went there for cycle first. Yeah. And then I was like, Oh, well, if I can like, basically get better at teaching in the bootcamp room, essentially, Barry's. So it's, I was really, that was like a goal for me. And then, like, berries didn't work out. Like I still go there as a client, but I definitely wouldn't want to, you know, I'm happy with with how my journey, how the path was laid out for me in the end was definitely better for me as a person and as a trainer. But from Best I then got offered 1Rebel, and that was over four years ago. Yeah. And I've been with them ever since other than a short stint in Dubai.

**Will: 21:01**

And you. So you teach for Rebel, are you working across all of their brands. So let's give people a bit of a background of 1Rebel. We've talked about it on the show before because it is probably as the premium brand in London and they've expanded internationally. So as you've heard from Sarah, they're now in Dubai and there and sorry, in Saudi Arabia and opening and Dubai, they also have Melbourne, they do cycle, treadmill boot camps, they have recently opened rig, which is a little bit like in circuit F45 style workout and also reformer right, in Melbourne and in Victoria, so multidisciplinary, multidisciplinary studio founded by James Balfour, who I know well, from my time at ClassPass, very visionary in terms of bringing a very, very London spin on what kind of existed already. So you have Barrys, and you had SoulCycle. And 1Rebel really took a kind of a different approach. They took the one river like implies the kind of rebellious nature of the brand. And they really gave a real London feeling to boutique and it's

probably been the premier boutique in London for a long time. So do you focus on all of their brands? Are you specializing in sort of the ones that you teach?

**Sarah 22:12**

So I so I first obviously went in with R1DE, which is kind of like,

**Will: 22:18**

that's what we're gonna focus on. So we're gonna get back to that. But

**Sarah 22:21**

yeah, went in with R1DE, and then as many trainers, I'm sure listening to this, and you definitely know, if all you teach your cycle, you are limited. Yeah, yeah, for sure.

**Will: 22:34**

That's one of our mantras with SH1FT is that like, if you can teach one thing, then you can teach another thing, and you're limiting yourself by not doing so you're not necessarily going to have the same, you're not necessarily going to be as good or as perfectly placed for every different modality, but you should give it a go, because you'll find that you like it.

**Sarah 22:52**

Yeah. And if you don't want to just feel exhausted and like I

**Will: 23:00**

Yeah, because at boutique, cycle is, the one where you can't really stop, right, like, in most of the booty classes, you can kind of walk around a little bit and that gives you longevity and the ability to teach the classes. Whereas if you're teaching cycle, you pretty much on the bike, you can you can stop for a little bit, but you're pretty much working out the whole time. Yeah.

**Sarah 23:16**

And to be honest, what pushed me into taking in I mean, I was obviously I've done my little Barry's thing. So reshape, which is the treadmill bench workout was always like the next thing on my radar, but I just love cycle. So I find that the most fun it goes the fastest. Like it's I just love it. So okay, so

**Will: 23:41**

Let's let's let's deep dive into that a little bit what like, like, and you touched on a little bit, but what specifically do you love about teaching a cycle class?

**Sarah 23:52**

I feel like it just doesn't feel like you know, when and I know that not everyone feels this way. But you know when like, as a trainer, sometimes I'll be like, just literally forget about what's outside, and like what's happening in your life today, or what happened yesterday, or what's gonna happen tomorrow, like, the music is on. It's essentially like when you're in a club or a bar and like, really good music's on. And you're just like, in that moment, you are just dancing to the music. You're not dancing to this amazing music in a bar and thinking like, yesterday this really weird conversation happened at work and that you're just genuinely enjoying yourself and I think that is what I feel insightful. Yeah. And when I do people's classes, that is how I feel as well. So when I that's what there was a trainer in virgin active Epsom back when I was a student who his class was the most fun I've ever had, that's what kept me



going back. Yeah. And he left and I went and did his classes that weren't even cycle that like this weird leisure center just because he as a person was so fun. So I think for me, you know, like, there's loads of people that absolutely slammed indoor cycling, because...

**Will:** 25:22

Oh, like James Smith PT.

**Sarah** 25:24

And I was literally thinking about that exact clip.

**Will:** 25:26

I don't mind James Smith, PT, but his views on cycling can eff off, in my opinion.

**Sarah** 25:31

I agree. I'm in I'm in the same bracket there. But anyone that loads of people like, again, if you teach cycle, there is guaranteed so many people that when you say what you do, they always go, I don't really like it. It's just dancing on a bike. It's like, is that hurting you? Like, is that a problem, really?

**Will:** 25:50

This is this comes back to my center philosophy, which is, guess what, guys, any movement is better than no movement? Get off your high horse. And if someone really likes doing something, then that's great. It's like when people go, or Zumba is just, you know, they're not even working out when they're doing something. But well, guess what? They're moving and moving is important.

**Sarah** 26:10

Yeah, they're doing more than sitting on their sofa. I don't want to go to the gym and lift weights. Like, if you find something that you enjoy, you will not give up because it doesn't feel like a chore.

**Will:** 26:24

Exactly. What's the best exercise is the one that you do.

**Sarah** 26:28

Yeah, the one that you actually do. And I see it a lot in, like my clients over the years that they've looked like it, especially people who are at the very, very, very beginning of their fitness journey. Cycling is less intimidating for pretty much everyone. Like you can sit on the back row, the room is dark. Yeah, you're static, you're just clipped in,

**Will:** 26:54

You're in control of your dial, meaning that if you don't want to turn it up, you can pretend.

**Sarah** 26:59

Yes, we've all done it. Yeah, we definitely have often teaching. And like, it's just I feel that for people who are brand new or like, if their fitness isn't great at the start, and they're trying to lose weight, or they're trying to just build their fitness, they that's where I personally see the most consistency across all the concepts that I teach, the most consistent in terms of the people that are beginners, they always keep coming back to cycle because all they have to do is sit down on that seat, enjoy the music pedal

for 45 minutes, and they've just done 45 minutes extra movement than they would have done a week ago.

**Will:** 27:42

And you know, government guidelines are 150 minutes of moderate exercise, which is walking in above. And if you can go and sit in a dark room and let go of your worries for a period of time and do some exercise and my book that is winning.

**Sarah** 27:57

Yeah. Like it's, I just think everyone needs to just stay in their lane. Like if I there's loads of things that I don't enjoy, do it and like, on a fitness sense of things and like, I'm not gonna turn around and like, say to someone that does enjoy it, like it's not even a workout. Like, why would you do that? There's no point like, it's rude.

**Will:** 28:18

It's also just, it's so silly, right? When people within the fitness industry are judgmental about what other people do I feel that there's, I think that we're moving past it, I think we're getting to a point post pandemic, where people realize that, you know, if you want to take people on a walking group, like I have to admit that earlier on in my career, I would have been like walking as exercise, how ridiculous, whereas the older I get, and the more I realized that, you know, as my back starts to go and this thing, but also like, even just from a scientific perspective, going on holiday and going for a walk, you know, walking around a city for a day realizing how many calories I've actually burned just through moving. Yeah, I've managed to get over myself. And I agree with you that other people within the industry need to get over themselves when they start judging certain things like cycle.

**Sarah** 29:02

Yeah. And you know, it's so funny because anyone who's lived in the Middle East and quite a lot of other cities to be fair, you do not walk here.

**Will:** 29:13

Yeah, you drive an air conditioned car to an air conditioned building.

**Sarah** 29:17

Oh my gosh, like in London, I could like a normal day like 15 20,000 steps without actually trying. Yeah.

**Will:** 29:26

Just because you had to.

**Sarah** 29:29

Yeah, here like, I walk. Like some people think I'm crazy. Like I still will walk to work either. It's like 10 minutes. Some people are literally like, are you still walking? I'm like, It's 10 minutes. They're like, but it's 45 degrees. But I literally like I have to move. And you know, I've really noticed when I when I first got to Dubai, I was like, I'm feeling like I'm still training. I'm still doing my workouts but something's feeling different. Like my energy feels different and I don't know Why and I realized it's because I was struggling to even hit like 5000 steps, let alone 1050 and 20. And it makes a difference like that extra. So yeah, I agree that like, it's not really, it's more just about what you do in between and between

between your workouts and your classes that actually makes a difference. Yeah. And if what you enjoy doing is riding a bike and doing some push ups and tap back then do it.

**Will:** 30:36

Yeah, good for you. Okay, so on cycle, I have to so now you're involved with one variable, and you're involved with sort of brand development of the brand, but also master training. So you know, selecting and training and making cycle instructors better. So I'm really keen to know what you think makes a good cycle instructor. And I'll start by saying that I so for people that don't know, we launched ride earlier this year, Sarah was a big part of development of rides, we don't have to digitally beforehand, and then we've launched the instructor versions, and our instructors will have seen her on some of the recent releases. I wanted ride to have a boutique feel for exactly the reasons we've just talked about. I didn't want it to be purely performance based, because I think there's a market for that. But I think the market for that is somewhat limited. And I wanted to create an environment that was just a little bit more fun and allowed our instructors to bring more people in. One of the things that I particularly liked about you and I went to your class is that you had that real I'm in the moment, I'm losing myself in the music. But you did something that I think is really important, which I think comes from more of a big box background that a lot of boutique instructors don't do, which is you gave a profile for what the track was going to be and what the ride was going to be. And you used seconds, because I find that a lot of boutiques historically have recruited from performers and performers are really bad at not going, Okay, this next effort is 20 seconds, meaning that the people in the class don't know how long they're going to work. One of the things I immediately noticed about you is that you were in the music, you were doing the performance stuff, but you were going, okay guys, we're now going to do a three minute climb, followed by a, you know, a 30 second push, which I think is super important for the effort that the individuals are doing. So that's kind of what I look for an instructor is someone that can deliver the experience, but also give me an understanding as a member or a class member of what is coming up. What is it that you look for when you're recruiting and training your instructors? And for the people listening who teach cycle? What are the things that they could work on, or they could think about to become better?

**Sarah** 32:43

I think, like, teaching cycle is for sure a performance, there has to be a level of like confidence. And, you know, you've got to know your music, and you have to have a personality, because at the end of the day, it started, like I said earlier, like all people are doing and literally just start looking at you.

**Will:** 33:06

Standing up sitting down, standing up, sitting down.

**Sarah** 33:10

Looking at you, like that their head is they are literally pinned to a piece of equipment that is facing you like there's no in boxing where they're looking at their bag, but they're listening to you or reshaped where they're running on the treadmill, you're just talking like you actually need something about you that is engaging that, you know, I'm not I don't get off like a lot of people that rebel will get off the bike, they'll walk around and you know, they'll stand in front of people on the bike and really connect with them that way. And it's a skill for sure. Like I really admire that, but I just can't do it. And because I've not done it for so long. I remember like quite early on at one level, they said to me, like try and get off and connect with people that way. And like because I'd been there for about a year already. And everyone that knew me knows that I pedal every pedal with them. Like I do not get off the bike, I own

clips to get off to walk around and everyone stopped. Okay, I'm gonna get my card and we're just gonna move and ever since that is if anyone suggests me getting off I'm just like, it's just not myself. So I always think as well know your style and what you are as a trainer. Like don't go to other people's classes and try and be like them, be you but on a bike and like and that I feel like that is what I am as a trainer like I don't suddenly become this like huge, like crazy personality like I'm really normal. Rubbish. I laugh at my own jokes.

**Will:** 35:02

As an instructor, the ability to laugh at your own jokes is fundamental.

**Sarah** 35:10

The amount of times you'll say something and you'll look at everyone like that was good. So, uh, yeah, I feel like from that side of things, you know, you have to know who you are, know your music taste as well. And like, own it actually just fully own it like, you will not not everyone will like you. Not everyone will like your music. It's okay, if you don't want to write to hip hop or r&b, like, if you prefer rock music, or if you genuinely just love little mix, like, write it. Don't let anyone say like, oh, I don't like your music, you should change it, if anyone's telling you to change. It's not the right. It's either clients and you're like, I don't think like, that's your opinion. But yeah, you know, I haven't the job for a reason. So or if like, anyone that's given you a job is telling you you need to change, then it probably means that it's not the right job for you.

**Will:** 36:12

Yeah, cuz like we because R1DE is pre so it's pre-programmed in that we give the music out. But I don't expect all of our instructors to necessarily resonate with every track. And that applies to because, you know, we prefer it's pre-choreographed in terms of we give the moves, and we give the music. But like, I think it's important that instructors realize that, that doesn't mean that you have to love every song and love every every type. And you know, I know that there's some people that just simply feel that some things are too fast. And we're really big on telling our instructors look, give it a go. And if it doesn't work for you, that's when you can switch out and mix and match tracks, because you don't need to be able to do every single style and you're not always going to resonate with every single type of music.

**Sarah** 36:57

Yeah, and this is why I really respect you know, what SH1FT do and what 1Rebel do in the sense of like, it's the same one rebel in the sense of when you what's like, first art training, they're the this is a ride, they give you a structure of the music, as in, they don't tell you what music to play. They just say, for example, the first track, the music needs to be this vibe, this energy, this feeling like it's all linked to how the music makes you feel, rather than what RPM or like what actual track or genre you use. So you're given this framework, and then you take that and you make it your version. And it's the same as stiff, like, Okay, you're getting given the music, but like, you could give me I mean, especially when it's royalty free, it's never gonna feel the same as right into like a number one. Yeah. So it's like, okay, instead of thinking that it was the same when I taught ride live, the techno jam is all royalty free. So it's like, instead of thinking of it as a negative and being like, Oh, the you know, the music isn't really for me. Like, it's a beat. And you can make it fun.

**Will:** 38:16

Yeah, and there's rises and falls, right. Like, I have to admit that when we because when we we partnered with pure energy. And I have to say that I wasn't exactly sure how it was going to go.

Because I have historically always worked out to popular music, like when I was with Les Mills, it was always number one music. But they've got a big enough catalog. And the key thing for me is finding music that has you know, peaks and troughs. It has it has like a music has a drop, you know, it has some silent parts, it has some big parts. Like, the key to being a good cycle instructor is not necessarily having the like the ultimate playlist that everybody's gonna like, because here's the deal, not everybody is gonna like your playlist.

**Sarah 38:55**

Even if you've got the best playlist, it's opinion.

**Will: 38:58**

Even if you are even if you are a top DJ and you have mixed that whole thing yourself. Not everybody's gonna like it because not everybody's tastes the same. But what you can do is you can listen to the song you can figure out this is when I change my vocals to be a little bit quiet. This is when I push this is when I drive people this is when I pull back and this is when I push forward.

**Sarah 39:17**

Yeah, and actually that comes on to a really good point and one of the main things I look for you know when I'm mentoring new trainers here or if I'm just going to someone's class to do a workout is their energy levels, like if you are down here the whole time, I'm bored. Yeah, if you are up here the whole time I'm annoyed.

**Will: 39:44**

That's so true. Right like it's so I completely agree.

**Sarah 39:47**

I'm exhausted watching it. Yeah, yeah. Like I think like 1Rebel a great because I can't think of anyone that is like that because they're very good at hiring people that are like, just very authentic. But I get it when you're a new trainer, you actually think that that's what it takes is high energy like, yeah, all the time. And it's actually the opposite. Like it's less effective. Yeah. I want someone to be able to talk and conversational tone. Yeah, tell me what's happening, what's coming, what, what I need to give, and like you said about how I teach, like, it's a train, it is a training session, okay. Like we said, it's fun, you want to do it. And the reason indoor cycling, like it might get slammed, but it is, it's a, it's a movement, so let's just let it be. But equally, if, if you want it to be a good workout, which I do, as a trainer, you should want to help your clients improve their fitness, you know, their endurance and their power. And to do that, you have to program it.

**Will: 41:05**

Yeah. You have to know when you have to give people risks. And you have to know when people are pushing hard and you have to know when people are going extra hard. Yeah. How long...

**Sarah 41:15**

Oh, God, you know, when the when it's like, because in my classes are quite often put standing surges in. Yeah. And I confidently put them in because I'm like, I am going to tell you that it's 30 seconds long. So everyone can mentally be like, okay, it's hard. Yeah, it's only for 30 seconds. Yes. And then I get to rest. Whereas the most the worst thing is when it's like now stand up and double time, and you're like, is it a minute? Is it 30 seconds? Is it the whole track? Like, yeah, are we doing because I need to know.

**Will:** 41:53

I actually I laugh about this, because the I will often go to cycle classes. And I feel that they're like, this happens a bit less than this. But there's this classic type of old guy who was a cyclist that goes to assign it. Sometimes cycle classes have power meters, right, and you can see the output of people. And this is like the classic dude who's like 45 Plus, and he's in bib shorts, and he's wearing a heart rate monitor. And he doesn't do any of the choreography. And he does not he does not go slow. He does not go fast. He just sits at the back and grinds and he often gets the highest power score of the class. But he's not doing anything. He's literally just sitting at a static at a static speed, pushing hard the whole time as if he's doing an outdoor mountain climb. Which again, given my approach to fitness, I'm like, mate, you do you that's fine. Yeah, I'm not gonna get angry at you about it. But it makes me laugh because it's kind of not the it's not the point of of what we're trying to achieve. But if but if you like it, and you're getting that same escapism in the dark room and music, then I'm like, you know, fill your boots.

**Sarah** 42:55

It's weird, right? I have two very like opposing opinions on it. And like, on the day as to how I'm going to say I feel.

**Will:** 43:04

I'm fine if they don't sit in the front row. If you're sitting in the front row, and you're doing that I'm like, mate, no.

**Sarah** 43:10

Even if someone is going to sit on the front row, and okay, they're gonna be on the beat, but they don't want to do the choreo, I'm like, don't sit on the front row. It's actually like disrespectful to me as a trainer. It's essentially like I'm gonna come for dinner with you, but I'm gonna ignore you. Like it's and that's the only thing I sometimes feel with that is like, okay, I kind of in one sense, I'm glad that you obviously don't find me annoying that you don't want to do my actual program but you're happy to sit here and listen to me shout at everyone. Like especially at rebel you know, I have a bit more of a rock. Yeah, you do. So I did attract slightly more men that probably did just want to hear music that was a bit different to the standard cycle class. And I'm fine that okay, it's not for everyone to do the get lows and the rock backs. Yeah, so that's cool. That is so fine. Get like sit back there and you just enjoy...

**Will:** 44:16

This is actually like a really good hint and tip, sorry to interrupt you but it makes me think a tip for anyone that teaches cycle and it has this problem is if you have someone like that in your class be super nice to them go up to them and say look I'm really really glad that you come to this class. Is it okay if you go on the second row because it can be a little bit off putting to people that are like doing the choreography I want you to be here I'm totally fine with you doing exactly what you want. There's no requirements. There's no need for you to do it. But just could you go over to that bike?

**Sarah** 44:46

Yeah. Yeah. But also, "get back, because you're annoying me". Haha, so funny, but it's it's funny because I think it's as a trainer, and I'm kind of different in all the concepts I teach, but like I have, I feel like I have a lot of patients and like that, like I would, I'm always trying to see things from like client's point of view, and like, the positive side of any situation that's happening. But then there's also that level

of me that like, once I'm, like, done with the patience like, I can be brutal. And I think that is also a part of having confidence as a trainer, because at the end of the day, like they have booked to be there, and they've chosen to come to your class. And it is that knowing your worth in the sense of like, okay, if people are going to be rude to you, or if, if things aren't gonna go your way, in the middle of the class, like, you know, a lot happens, like the music will put out or your mic will turn off, you have to go into the room and literally be like, this is like, this is my space, like, they've chosen to be here. They saw my name on the schedule, when they booked in, and I am confidently holding this room for 45 minutes, no matter what happens. And I always say that to new people. Like, don't apologize, like if your mic breaks, don't slap. Just be like, it's cool. Like we're gonna, it's, it's technology.

**Will:** 46:28

Because when something like that has happened, and you're new, it feels like, it feels like time stands still. The longest time in the world. And the thing that that I always remind brand new instructors is it feels like an hour for you. But for the people in the class, it's just a flash. Like they don't even they half the time they don't even notice.

**Sarah** 46:49

I was going to say some of them won't even notice. You'll come out and you'll be like crying and then they're all just like, don't even know what happened. Which is why I always say like, there's no point you being like, I'm so sorry, guys, like the microphone cut out. I'm so sorry. Like, let's say because we've all done it. You say it's a 30 second sprint, and then the music stops after 15.

**Will:** 47:16

And then you go, and now push and the rest.

**Sarah** 47:21

Ah, it kills me. I still do stuff like that like it's always going to happen. And it's like, instead of being like, oh, I'm sorry, I messed that up. I make them sprint in silence. I'm like, like, you just have to own it. Like, if you draw more attention to it, more people are gonna realize that yeah, basically. Yeah. Confidence.

**Will:** 47:47

That's fine. I agree. Okay, so we've talked, we could talk forever on cycling, I feel but I do want to touch on something non-cycle related, which is quite unique to what you're doing, which is the state of fitness in the Middle East. So you have recently done a stint in Dubai. And now you are in Saudi, which is obviously a an interesting place for that a lot of people haven't been to, and it's a place where fitness is exploding. Tell me a little bit about your experience in let's let's not focus on Dubai, because I think a lot of people that listen to this might have a familiarity with Dubai. Tell me a little bit about Saudi and what's happening with fitness in Saudi.

**Sarah** 48:26

So Saudi in general, is I think misunderstood like maybe not misunderstood, but it's a lot of people obviously if

**Will:** 48:38

If you're watching this you'll be seeing that Sarah is is a young, blonde female wearing a strappy top, so...

**Sarah 48:53**

Yes, I've got my shoulders out and everything. So yeah, and it is like it is a thing to be a white, blonde female here like it is. It's the first time in my life I've ever been exotic. You know, I'm basically everyone looks like me in fitness in London. And now I think I don't think I've seen another blonde person since I've been here like seriously. But I mean the difference in like, you know, Dubai is so expat like the first language is English. Like if you go into a shop the first thing they speak English to you, regardless of where they're from. Saudi is not. Saudi is everyone's speaking Arabic. Everyone I see is a local or that they're working. And it's just completely different to like anywhere I've ever been. It gets you know this like even my mom when I was like I'm gonna take the job in Saudi, she was like, no, I don't think so. At the end of the day, I mean, I'm not here permanently, I am going back to Dubai. But I have to say, I mean, I've been here for nearly maybe like six weeks. And I honestly think I've learned more in six weeks than I have in the last like two years of me working in London, I think I've developed and seeing more because basically, like the beginners that come through the doors in the UK...Imagine everyone is like that, or like not everyone. But...

**Will: 50:42**

Yeah, that's the thing, right? Fitness is fitness is not something that they have grown up doing. And therefore you're bringing an entirely new thing. Yeah, yeah, no, I was having this conversation with another person that was based in Saudi recently. And like, all kinds of like, political, political things aside, it's quite interesting to think that you're bringing, I'm a very big believer in fitness as something that is important for everybody. And your what you're doing is really bringing fitness to people that have really no basic basis in working out, right? Like they're just absolutely beginners. They drive everywhere. They don't have a culture of sport. It's too hot for them to be playing outside. Yeah, so this has never been a factor in their lives, never been done.

**Sarah 51:26**

Yeah. And you know, the female...So also, it is still it is crazy. It's still illegal for men and women to work out in the same space. So 1Rebel here has

**Will: 51:40**

Queen of gyms and King of gyms.

**Sarah 51:42**

Exactly We're queen and king here. Yeah, so they have the female gym. And then about 10 minutes up the road is the male gym. Yeah. So it's, it's not even like in Dubai, where there'll be ladies only classes and mixed gym. It is literally like a man cannot even walk into the door of the gym, if it's a female, and like, I mean, women is slightly different on the other end of things, but like, it's, it has to be separate. And so so again, that's another thing, like, I'm very used to training men, like, yeah, a lot of my classes attracted males, just from my music type. And just the fact that I'm, you know, I, the way I program, my class is very structured, which I know like men that want like you, want to know... Yeah,

**Will: 52:34**

you want to know what the programming is. And you want to know, like, the profile of the of the workout.

**Sarah 52:39**

And like, even when I do PT, like I've only ever I just I find training males almost easier than training females. And here, I don't integrate with men, like ever. So that's a completely different situation. For



me, anyway, like, even the male trainers at work, like I might see them once a week, you know, like you're not integrated with each other at all. And then, like the clients is, you're not just bringing fitness to people who haven't had much fitness in their life, you're bringing fitness to people who haven't had much movement in their life, right?

**Will:** 53:26

This brings us right back to what we started talking about. Right? Like, yeah, you're introducing something that's that's going to be fundamentally amazing for their whole life that they've just never had any background in.

**Sarah** 53:37

Yes. You know, if someone walks into your class in London or or Dubai, and they said, You know, I've not really done any fitness before. If you tell them to do a squat, they still kind of know what it is. Yeah, yeah. Like a press up. They genuinely don't know how, like you have to start from THE beginning. And like you have to be patient.

**Will:** 54:06

Yeah, patience and like probably retrained you on some of this stuff that we forget about doing right because we all as instructors forget how it is for a brand new beginner and go okay, get into push up position. And that's fine for the people that have done a push up before but if someone's never done a push up, then that doesn't help them at all.

**Sarah** 54:24

Yeah, like you know, get go into a plank, like you turn around in London and everyone's in a plank. Yeah, you say do a plank here. And also, I'm not speaking their first language. Yeah. I've had a few people that I've had to say what's happening and the person next to them had to translate, Yeah.

**Will:** 54:45

Yeah, so I guess it's probably taking you back to bases a little bit and helped you to help you to figure out some of the maybe the not maybe the the laziness that had crept into your teaching just because it because you didn't have to focus on that real basic stuff, which I think happens to everybody.

**Sarah** 55:01

Yeah, and one of the main things I really love about 1Rebel as a brand is I find they are very welcoming and very inclusive, like they don't have, like you walk in front of house are always super friendly. The trainers are like it's really important to us like this is like, this is everywhere, like all of the clubs. Like, it's important to us that everyone feels like 1Rebel is a safe place for them to come. And they're not getting judged. It's not got this like, I don't have do you think fitness has come a long way, even in the last, I think COVID helped. But even before that, it took a turn away from this, like military-like shaming...

**Will:** 55:47

Yeah, like it's been real focused on aesthetics and more of a focus on movement as a method of keeping you healthy. That's, I think that like, if there's any major lasting effect of COVID, I'm hoping that the impact of health and fitness and movement on longevity is the big one.

**Sarah** 56:07

100%. So I really, that's one of the reasons that I've stayed with 1Rebel for so long is because I really believe in like, and I believe that even you know, the top like James Gyles, all our head office, like, everyone's priority is the same, like you've not got anyone that's pushing anything that everyone's on the same page, basically, which is make fitness accessible and fun. And make every single person whether it's whether they started on the first day reopened, St. Mary apps, or whether it is their first day through the door now make everyone feel the same. Yeah. And that's what I love about rebel. But it's like in Saudi, it's like, everyone how you teach, like it basically in London, yes, that's how we want everyone to feel. And as a trainer, I really wanted new people to feel welcome. But you almost take for granted how good everyone is. Like even on the treadmill, like no one would ever struggle. Or it would be rare that people would be having to pull back to a walk in the middle of the run. Like most people, I think London as well has this mentality of like, get shit done. Get it done. And then, and then you come here, and they're like, some people have never been on a treadmill before. So like, then just jogging on a treadmill is genuinely an achievement. So you have to basically like, take what you think is an achievement for the people you teach in London and Dubai is obviously similar, more of a mixed bag, but still similar vibe. And then you basically take it from up here, and you bring it to here, you you have to learn to, like, acknowledge and congratulate like the smallest things that I now actually do think like, I get excited them. But when you have to know that coming into it that like you are, some of them are amazing. Like the club has been open two years and some of them are like, it's not about speed. I always say that, like, I hate it in treadmill classes when trainers walk up and down, shoutin what speeds. And like, as in, okay, we're giving you a format. And if we're doing a sprint, like, let's not congratulate the person that's running on the 20 kilometers per hour, but actually think about that person is running two points above what they ran two weeks ago, like, instead of it being about the actual speed, it's about the effort level. Like I always say like, you could be running on the fastest speed in the room. But if that's like not your top effort, then it's more impressive that this person who is actually running on the slowest speed in the room, but that is their absolute best. And that's basically what Saudi is like, like you, you have to basically forget everything that you've done in like Western fitness and see it for exactly what it is on that day in that class.

**Will:** 59:39

Yeah, I get it and that actually and we've been talking for an hour and I'm conscious of your time. I think that is a fantastic place to finish in terms of philosophy, which is remembering that everybody is like everybody starts somewhere and knowing that you can congratulate people on the smallest thing if it's something for them is something that every trainer and every instructor could probably focus more on because I think it's something we forget. And we we learn to praise people that are up at the front working really super hard. And sometimes forget that the new person down the back that's actually done a full squat for the first time might be the one that really deserves the praise and will be the most impacted by it.

**Sarah** 1:00:19

Yeah, and they really, if you can make the person who is just done the full squat, or like they've just actually done a weighted squat for the first time. If you can notice that, and acknowledge it, they will trust you as a trainer forever.

**Will:** 1:00:41

And they'll come back, which ultimately is what we want, right?

**Sarah** 1:00:44

Yeah, exactly. Like, if you focus so much on the people that come every single week that you forget about the people that are new, like, you're missing such a good opportunity. And at the end of the day, really what you have to constantly remind yourself why you are doing this job, like what is your actual reason? And if it isn't, for you to help those people, and it's only for you to like, pick up the people that are already amazing, then it's like you need to reassess what what you actually want from this as a job because that's really where the importance of our role...

**Will:** 1:01:25

Yeah I think that's the biggest change that we can make, right? Like, if you think about what changes you can make in your community and society as a whole, it's by it's not by making good people better. It's by making new people start.

**Sarah** 1:01:38

Yes. And giving them confidence. Because like I even when I even me, like I've been a trainer now for like eight years, and I go into new gyms and like, I don't get nervous, like to be in a new environment anymore. But I went to a different like, I went to a CrossFit gym the other day to do a conditioning class. And I'm stood there and I'm like, I've never been in this environment before. Like, I do feel that like, oh, I'm kind of just stood here on my own. And it as a trainer, I actually really suggest everyone continues to do that. Because it reminds you how it feels. And if and if I feel like that, and I am a qualified professional in the industry, and have been for so long, then imagine then the level that it feels for someone that's never been to a gym before. And just how you smile at people and how you speak to people, it goes a long way. And so it's like be a good trainer, but be a good person.

**Will:** 1:02:39

Yeah. Well, Sarah Stoneley, thank you so much for taking the time to chat to us about all things cycle. Now if you're listening to this and you're a SH1FT Instructor when Sarah manages to find a way back from the Middle East, she will be on more SH1FT content, so I'm looking forward to that time. But um, but until then, I'm sure that if anyone wants to follow you, we will put all your social media links so they can check out exactly what you're doing and what you're doing. And if you ever find yourself in in Dubai or Saudi you know who to look up for a great cycle class.

**Sarah** 1:03:10

The only blonde person.

**Will:** 1:03:14

Perfect. Sarah, thank you so much. See you later.

**Sarah** 1:03:17

Bye.

**Will:** 1:03:18

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@sh1ffitness.com](mailto:will@sh1ffitness.com). I'm Will Brereton and you've been listening to Group Fitness Real Talk.