

'I'M HELPING COLLEAGUES GET IN SHAPE'

Features Director Devinder Bains, 34, trained to be a personal trainer "If I'm not talking about Beyoncé or dogs, then there's a good chance I'm chatting exercise. It might be a marathon I'm running, a new fitness class I've discovered, or showing someone how to do a proper stomach crunch (hands on temples and always look straight ahead).

I'm a fitness fanatic, so I hopped, skipped and jumped at the chance to become a personal trainer. It was something I'd always been interested in, but it seemed impossible. How would I manage it with a hectic full-time job and a full-on social life? Well, I was about to find out.

Last August, I enrolled on a personal training course with The Training Room. They offer a range of different programmes around the country, but I chose a part-time, seven-month option. Mixing exercise and theory, I take classes one weekend a month, with lots of homework and revision in between - think learning names of bones, how the heart works and, of course, practising every exercise known to humankind.

'MY MATES PARTIED WHILE I STUDIED'

As the weeks rolled by, there were plenty of sacrifices. I had to miss out on birthday parties, nights out and a weekend away with my uni mates in order to write essays about muscle groups or mock training plans for imaginary clients.

I passed the first half of the course in October, which meant I qualified as a gym instructor. But the amount of homework and revision only increased in the second half of the course. In fact, I spent most of the Christmas holidays with my head in a book, swotting up on the best ways to work out with dumb-bells and kettlebells. In just two weeks, I have my final exams. Then, fingers crossed, I'll be a fully qualified personal trainer.

It's been such hard work, but I'm genuinely enjoying learning something brand new and I love practising on mates and colleagues. One of my guinea pigs has been *Fabulous*' Senior Features Writer Claie Wilson, and watching her go from a mega-busy mum who's never really exercised, to a gym bunny lifting weights and bashing out press-ups, has been amazing for her and me.

It might not be a permanent change in career for me, but I'm definitely going to carry on training friends. Helping someone succeed and fulfil their goals is such a buzz."

CHALLENGE CHECKLIST

*A part-time blended learning course with The Training Room costs around £3,200 (£3,500 if you live in London). This includes registration and course fees. It takes place over seven weekends, and classes are 9.30am-5pm both days. For more information, visit thetrainingroom.com.

*You'll need a training kit for the physical classes. A T-shirt, leggings, trainers, socks, and a sports bra are essentials. All gym equipment is provided.

*For the rest of the lessons, you'll just need a pen and notebook.



Previous page (L-R) Katie wears: Jackie; Spina; trousers: Kate; Kim's own; biker; Eachway R2; helmet: Carina; trainers: Kati's own; Ahlente wears: Jackie; Argyle; trousers: New; boots: Mendi; Devinder wears: Top; boxer shorts; Devinder's own; trainers; Woodcreek; Hannah wears: pink; Smiley Betty; trousers: HM; boots; Hannah's own; Sarah wears: all clothes Sarah's own; Cyan wears: dress; ASDA; lights: New Look; shoes: Topshop; This page: Devinder wears: dress; River Island; cuff: New Look; shoes: Topshop

'I CHATTED TO A NEW MAN EVERY WEEK'

Assistant Editor Sarah Mason, 37, went looking for love "As I saw another friend tie the knot last year, it occurred to me I was still minus The One, despite an impressive back catalogue of dates and relationships. When I jokingly said to the *Fabulous* team that my challenge should be to find love, they agreed.

So was it just bad luck or had I been going wrong somewhere? In the past, I'd relied on meeting guys through friends or on nights out, but clearly that wasn't cutting it. First off, I enlisted the help of Alex Chubb, head women's coach at the London School of Attraction. He told me to forget traditional flirting techniques, like catching a man's gaze - they never notice, apparently - and strike up a conversation with blokes instead. Yikes.

I made myself chat to one new man every week - like in the supermarket or Pret, regardless of whether I fancied him. The aim was to boost my confidence, so when I did see someone I actually fancied, I wouldn't have any "I carried a watermelon" moments. It was pretty cringey asking men about their choice of sandwich, but they always chatted back. Result.

Next, I teamed up with 59 other singletons for a 24-hour 'Holi-date' to Venice with Doingsomething.co.uk. Wine tasting in beautiful surroundings gave us plenty to talk about, but still no sparks flew.

So, five months in, and with Mr Right still eluding me, it was time to bring out the big guns. During my first session with Jo Barnett, a dating coach, she told me to never leave the house without looking good, in case I bumped into a potential beau. Great in theory, but it meant setting my alarm 30 minutes early every morning to do my hair and make-up (previously my routine consisted of a slick of lip-balm on the train into work).

Jo and I met every three weeks, either at her office in London or via Skype. At one session we wrote a list of values that mattered to me, such as intelligence, kindness and a love of culture, and put them in order of importance. It made me wonder if I was too quick to reject people. We discussed where relationships went wrong and how to stop it happening again. I've often struggled to talk about things that bother me, bottling them up, so we worked on my communication skills.

CHALLENGE CHECKLIST

• Get yourself a dating coach. Contact mine, Jo Barnett, at Datingcoach.me.uk.

• The London School Of Attraction does weekend residential courses if you live outside London.

• "I found a sense of humour, bravery and a willingness to try new things were essential. Doingsomething.co.uk has great ideas for unusual date activities.



Jo also set me challenges such as speed dating, which I dreaded. But I found the secret is to be smiley and ask lots of questions. After my first experience, I paired up with an arty guy who wasn't my usual type. The change was good, but it lasted three dates before his love of Nando's and my fondness for fine dining tore us apart.

Next, Jo wrote my profile for Mysinglefriend.com and told me to get professional photographs done. The result? Lots of dates and a huge confidence boost.

So, I guess you're wondering how I've been getting on... I've started dating Mark, 42, who I met through the website. He's a great guy. Is it love? Let's wait and see..."

• For Jo's tips on internet dating and writing a winning profile, visit Fabulousmag.co.uk ♦

