



▶ clean

BY SHARON LEICHAM

▶ up your

ACT

Establish a cleaning schedule for your store and equipment to keep *germs and grime* at bay.

They live on your dumbbells, treadmills, ellipticals, exercise bikes and just about every surface in your store. You can't see them, but they are there and having the times of their lives. They go by catchy names: *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Streptococcus viridans*, *Candida albicans*, diphtheroids and the infamous *E. coli*. These mean little pathogens can survive on surfaces up to 72 hours and cause infection, colds, flu and worse.

When customers visit your store, they bring more than their wallets. They carry nasty germs that transfer to your equipment. Hoist a barbell here, check out a treadmill there, and before you know it, your germ inventory is on overload. Germs aren't the only problem. Dust, dirt and grime can also make life miserable. Sounds like a job for Mr. Clean!

Keeping your store clean should be a no-brainer. But, in the course of a day or a week, things can get hectic and the little tasks, like wiping down equipment, vacuuming floors and dusting shelves, get postponed. A clean, well-maintained store saves you money by cutting down on energy costs, and a healthful store environment makes it a better place to work and visit. Most importantly, a good-looking store attracts customers and increases sales. Employing a Mr. Clean policy turns clean into green—cash that is!

ASSESS YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Take a few minutes to evaluate your store's cleanliness, starting from the outside and working your way into the store. Start on the sidewalk—an unkempt entryway, walkway or door can tarnish your overall image.

- » Look for trash piling up in gutters or in the parking lot and get rid of it daily.
- » Make sure the sidewalks are swept frequently. If you don't, a windy day will blow sidewalk trash into the store.
- » Clean your front windows two times a month to keep them free of dirt and grime so customers can see into the store.
- » Don't neglect the front door as it is the portal into the store and gets maxi-





mum notice, but it also collects fingerprints easily. It needs daily cleaning.

Now move inside and look at it from your customers' perspective. The first thing they see upon entering your store is the equipment. After all, that's why they came. First impressions count, so keep equipment sparkling clean and sanitary.

- » Clean handholds, seats and frames either with disinfecting cloths, soap and water, or bleach.
- » Schedule regular vacuuming and lubrication of treadmill belts, as customers will inadvertently carry dust and outside particles into the store on their shoes. To successfully sell equipment, it must be in optimal working order.
- » Get the feather duster out every morning to go over equipment and store surfaces.

Take a tip from Jerry Greenspan, owner of Exercise Equipment Experts in Columbus, Ohio, and clean your equipment thoroughly at least once a week. He solves his overall maintenance problem by rotating equipment every six months, selling off floor samples and replacing them with new models.

"When you have a lot of equipment, it's hard to keep up," Greenspan said. "But presentation is part of what people buy, so keeping the store maintained is all important."

MULTIPLE STORE MAINTENANCE

While it seems hard to adhere to a maintenance schedule in one store, imagine how difficult it is to stay on top of things if you own multiple stores. That's the challenge Total Fitness Equipment's co-owner Gary Catania faces in his 14 stores (four of which are owned with partner Rick Myers). He relies on his store managers and assistant managers to maintain high cleanliness standards.

"It's a battle, but the follow-through by our store managers keeps everyone on the ball," he said. "Let's face it, stores can get a little tired. But if the manager has pride in his store, he will maintain it. Store appearance is important to us."

Each day before the stores open, Catania's managers are required to have their stores vacuumed and dusted and the bathrooms cleaned. They repeat the maintenance routine at the end of the day. Catania believes in the hands-on approach: Either he, a district manager or a sales director visit each store randomly to inspect it, line up equipment and visit with the staff.

PLAN OF ACTION

No matter how many stores you have, estab-

lish equipment-cleaning procedures and make a list of the cleaning supplies you need to keep on hand. Keep supplies handy and easily available for the staff to use.

Create an equipment-cleaning and maintenance schedule and make it part of your daily staff routine. Appoint one staff person to oversee the maintenance program, but everyone should be capable of checking, lubricating and cleaning equipment, as well as vacuuming, dusting and cleaning in accordance with the maintenance schedule. Clean pads and frames weekly and upholstery bi-weekly with a soap and water solution to prevent cracks and tears.

While maintaining your equipment is all-important, the rest of your store also requires diligence.

- » **Mirrors:** Clean them weekly.
- » **Cash/wrap area:** Keep it free of clutter and make sure the counters are clean. Counters are popular germ habitats.
- » **Walls:** Paint walls every few years to keep them free of marks and scrapes.
- » **Filters:** Check air conditioning and heating filters monthly and replace when necessary to save energy costs.
- » **Trash:** Empty it every day.
- » **Staff hygiene:** Make sure your staff washes their hands frequently throughout the day to keep the spread of germs at bay.

Also, linoleum and tile floors must be mopped every couple of days. Ideally, carpets should be vacuumed every day or, at the least, once a week. Greenspan said he keeps his carpets clean and in good condition by employing a carpet cleaning service to deep clean his carpets twice a year. Regular carpet cleaning extends its life and saves money on carpet replacement. When hiring a service, ask about the dry extraction carpet cleaning system. Dry cleaning means that there is no carpet drying time or downtime required. Many large department stores utilize this carpet cleaning method with great success.

Don't neglect your lighting. Dust, grease

and dirt can accumulate on lamps and the reflecting surfaces of lighting fixtures and can reduce light output by as much as 30 percent. Clean your light fixtures every couple of years, at least. If you have a large number of fluorescent ceiling lights, consider group relamping (replacing all lamps in an area near the end of their useful life). This can cut lamp replacement labor costs in half and assures proper light levels.

And then there are the bathrooms! A dirty bathroom is probably the No. 1 way to turn off customers. Your bathroom should always be clean, stocked with plenty of paper products, soap and trash receptacles. It should be cleaned and inspected daily—and kept neat if it is shared by staff or also used as a store-room. Greenspan pays a professional cleaning service to give his bathrooms a thorough cleaning twice a month.

"If the bathrooms aren't clean, the store projects a bad image," he said. "It costs me \$50 to have my bathrooms cleaned professionally. Let's face it, you're not going to get your staff to do it, so hire it out." Catania, on the other hand, prefers to have each store take responsibility for its bathroom maintenance.

No matter how you choose to do it, keeping a clean store is not easy, but it's essential to a successful business. The store image you present to customers affects how they perceive the value of your merchandise. Even if you think you're doing a good job, take the time to audit your store's maintenance. If you find it lacking, develop maintenance procedures. If you don't have a maintenance schedule, create one. Keep in mind that maintaining a Mr. Clean store environment can keep those nasty little pathogens out and customer dollars rolling in.

- » To read more merchandising ideas and tips from Sharon Leicham, go to www.snewsnet.com/merchandising.



SUPPLY & DEMAND

TO MAINTAIN THE EQUIPMENT YOU SHOWCASE AND SELL, BE SURE TO HAVE THESE SUPPLIES ON HAND.

CLEANING SUPPLIES:

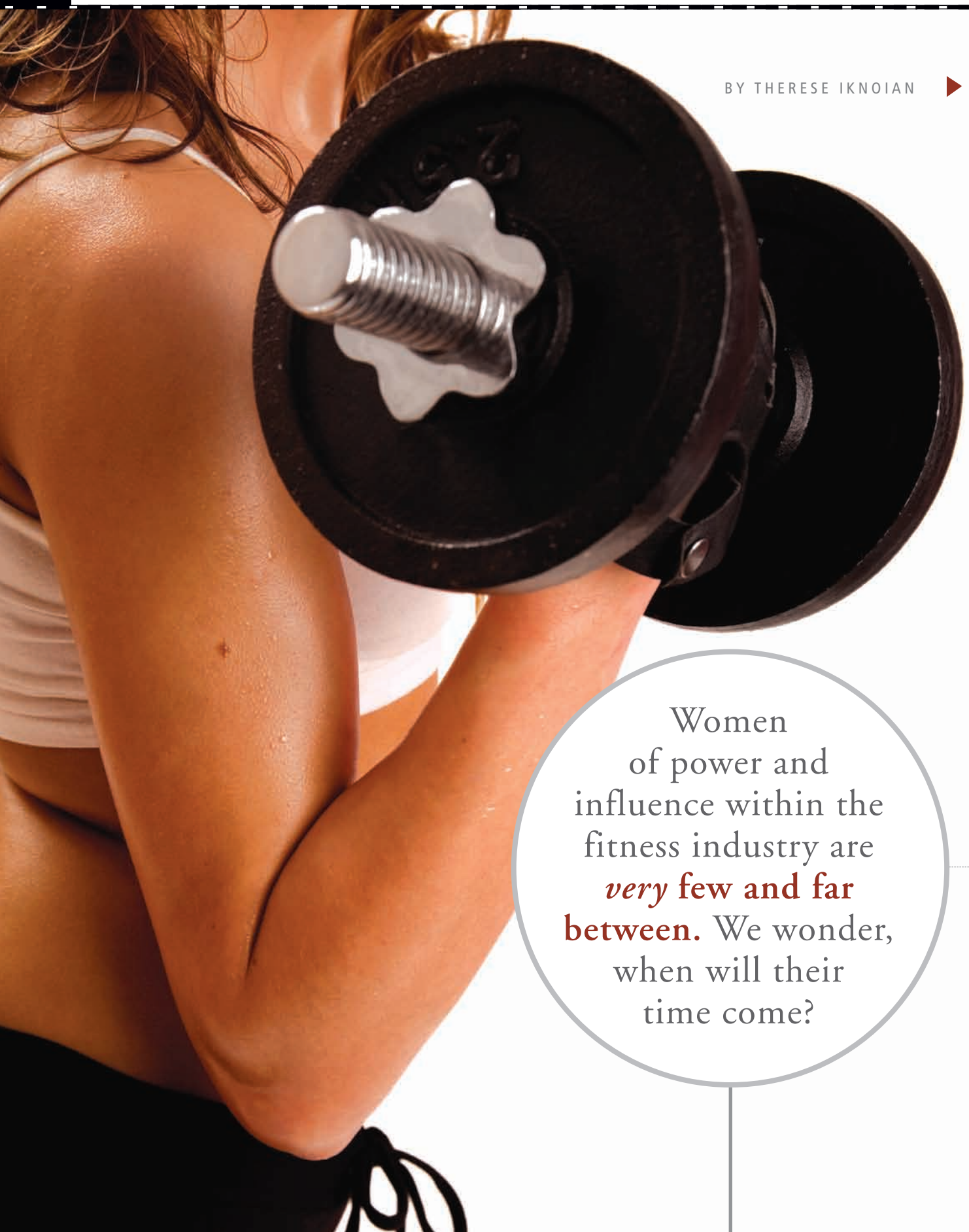
- » Disinfectant or bleach
- » Chrome polish
- » Glass cleaner
- » Manufacturer-recommended cleaning solutions

TOOLS:

- » Screwdrivers
- » Pliers
- » Different size screws, nuts and bolts to deal with equipment malfunctions
- » Other tools mandated by equipment manufacturers
- » Wrenches
- » Socket sets



BY THERESE IKNOIAN ▶ ▶

A close-up photograph of a woman's muscular arm and shoulder as she lifts a black dumbbell. The dumbbell has a silver metal handle with a white star-shaped grip. The woman is wearing a white tank top and black athletic shoes. The background is plain white.

Women
of power and
influence within the
fitness industry are
*very few and far
between.* We wonder,
when will their
time come?