Running any business is going to come with its own set of challenges—that’s just the way that life works.

But a business like health and physical fitness is going to come with a certain unique set of challenges; namely in setting yourself apart from the other, more well-known competitors. Chains that have successfully monetized peoples’ desires to get themselves into shape, and are successful enough at it that they can afford to spread across the country. Brick and mortar establishments that are locally owned face enough trouble in that department already, but getting someone to pick *your* gym over, say, Planet Fitness? Well, that just wasn’t an easy task.

But if you find your niche, an audience that you and you alone can cater to, then success is as simple as keeping your target demographic happy.

And in a gym that slowly became known as “the Gym for Fatties” it wasn’t exactly difficult to imagine what sort of things that might entail.

“Seriously? I thought we only served pizza on Fridays.”

Riley had only been working here for a few months—a little over a year and a half. After quitting Planet Fitness and then COVID forcing Anytime Fitness to cut costs and fire her as a personal trainer, working at Rueben’s was her ticket back into what she went to school for. It definitely beat working behind the counter at Office Depot, even if it was in a management position. But even though she wasn’t exactly as toned as she might have been when she was fresh off of her time as a PT, she was always moving and hustling and trying to work in some extra steps.

Something that the members of this particular gym seemed almost averse to doing.

Riley had grown accustomed to seeing especially large people. It had sort of become her niche as a physical therapist—while not *all* of her clients in the other gyms had been morbidly obese, a number of them had been. From Raye, Fayzan… Cheyenne… and now that her sister was starting to *really* put on weight, it was safe to say that Riley was becoming more and more comfortable by the year with people who were kinda big. But back at Anytime and Planet, her clients of a more “challenging” size were far more driven than even the skinniest members of Rueben’s.

“This place might as well have a freakin’ drive-thru window at this rate…”

Riley’s sour tone and disposition were understandable under any circumstance, regardless of any ethical disagreement with the way that Rueben’s pampered its clientele. She had been making decent money as a trainer at both of the other gyms that she worked for, and she had a degree in exercise science. Taking a desk job—literally, front desk receptionist—was going to be hard anyway, but her manager had told her that there would be some better-paying trainer positions opening up soon. This was only tangentially related to what she wanted to do with her life anyway, but…

Okay, something about the fact that literally only *two* of their treadmills were being used despite the fact that there were easily fifteen guests with them didn’t sit right on Riley’s stomach.

Of the thirteen people who were pigging out near the concessions table, there wasn’t a one of them that weighed under two hundred pounds. Soft bellies brushed against thick, fleshy glutes as they all crowded over one another, treating themselves to sugary drinks and greasy pizza, complete with breadsticks and marinara sauce on the side. The larger among them had actually gotten out of breath just from walking out of the changing room, their slow and heavy toddling turning into an outright waddle by the time they reached the main floor. They leaned against the walls, chunky cheeks spreading like butter across the flat surface as they made idle chit-chat with one another. The occasional head was thrown back in laughter, great bellies jostling with mirth before gnashing on another piece from the overly stocked pizza larder that had been put out by management just an hour or so before.

The Rueben’s company motto was “no shame”. Riley was all for people being comfortable in their own skin, and her history of working with exceptionally large clients had been one of the reasons that she had gotten this job in the first place, but all of this was just ridiculous.

“Do I have to sign in to get the free pizza?”

Riley snapped back to attention when her grumbling was interrupted by a somewhat familiar face. Riley had been working here long enough to know a few people by name, and Ruth was one of them. And in that time, the already plump mother of two had become that and then some. Her short brown bob rested on the outsides of a particularly fat face, framing chipmunk cheeks and a soft double chin as her glasses sat on top of the ridge of her button nose. The spherical shape of what had once been just an overworked and under exercised teacher had ballooned outward in just the short time that Riley had been working there, having put on at least forty pounds since the first time that the former trainer had scanned her in.

“No, Ruth, you don’t have to sign in.” Riley smiled in an officiously polite sort of way, “You just need to be a member.”

Riley did her best to keep the venom out of her voice as she spoke. It wasn’t Ruth’s fault that Riley was stuck here, after all.

“Thank you hun, it’s little things like this that keep me coming back here.” The other woman smiled broadly and clapped her hands together excitedly as she headed for the table, waddling with all of the grace of a walrus on land. “I have been waiting *all weekend* for gym day!”

And with that, Riley was alone again at the front desk. Watching the roly-poly Math teacher roll away tummy-first towards the only exercise that she would probably be getting all day. Even with the extra weight, she still wasn’t the biggest person that Riley had seen all day. Hell, Ruth wasn’t the biggest person in the gym *right now*. Far from it! Tummies sagged snugly into ill-fitting t-shirts or swelled against too-tight waistbands. There were more chins around that fold-out table alone than there were guests in the whole building. Pillowy arms creased and rolled as plump hands brought more fuel to the fire of their appetites’ grip on their bodies. And if Ruth kept going on at the pace she had been, she’d be joining the larger guests in size by this time next year!

Riley sighed deeply and shook her head as she went back to scrolling through Facebook on her phone. Normally she wouldn’t have been so blasé about whipping out her device while on the clock, but it was clear that nobody else cared about anything, so why should she? If this place could afford to be lax about the health of its members, then surely she could screw around and look at some memes while she waited for the next member to walk in.

Riley was snapped out of her pouting by the sound of someone clearing their throat. She looked up to see one of the larger members standing at the desk with a small smile on her face. The vast, belly-heavy physique that kept her a solid foot away from the desk forced her fat arms out to the side at an angle. Her small chest heaved in her shallow breaths as she fought against the sheen of sweat that had broken out across her forehead with the back of one hand.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but I wanted to ask if you had any suggestions for exercises that could help me tone my arms?"

The woman's voice was soft and gentle, in stark contrast to her size. Her dyed blue and purple hair matted against her blubbery back and cheeks, evidence of a pretty grueling workout routine for someone so big. Riley had seen her on the exercise bike (how could she not have?) and had been silently wishing her on from her seat before her mood had completely soured. Riley put down her phone and sat up a bit straighter in her chair.

"Of course! Give me *juuuuuust* a second." she said as she pulled up the gym's database of exercises on her computer. After a few minutes of searching, she found what she was looking for, printed out the sheet, and handed it over to the large woman in front of the counter with a smile.

"Here you go! These are some great exercises that will help you tone your arms." Riley’s animation and inflection readily returned in the case of people who seemed more genuine in their attempts to better themselves, “Let me know if you need anything else, okay?”

“Thank you so much.” The big woman looked down at the sheet and then back up at Riley with a grateful smile. "And, uh… is the, uh…”

“Oh, sure it’s free.” Riley said almost instinctively, her mood falling flat, “Feel free to eat as much as you want.”

“Thanks—I *really* worked up an appetite…”

Riley watched the large woman waddle away, her eyes following the gentle sway of her globular girth’s ponderous wobbling as she made her way back to the food. She looked down at her phone again and sighed deeply before going back to scrolling, her hand trailing over idly to bring the piece of pizza to her mouth in a grazing motion.

How this place was still in business, Riley didn’t think she’d ever know. Between pizza on Fridays, sundaes on Mondays, and donuts on Wednesdays, that had to get expensive. It wasn’t like the machines needed lots of maintenance, but that could only explain so much. The membership wasn’t even that expensive! But somehow they could afford a twenty-four hour staff, all of that food, and run the spa that came with their Black Card equivalent…

“Plus they can afford to pay me for me to sit here and get fat too.” Riley rolled her eyes as she leaned back in the chair behind her computer, her orange and green polo struggling slightly with the little ridge of additional fat that had begun cropping up since she’d gotten hired, “It’s perfect for everybody except anyone who actually wants to *lose* weight…”

Oh sure, she could have gone out there and used one of the machines during the slow hours. But according to management, that was “too intimidating”. That their guests didn’t need to feel like “they were in competition with our staff” or something. Honestly, Riley thought that it was just a way to keep the greeters from getting too distracted. But the front desk was *right there!*

“I need a better job, asap.” Riley sighed as she gnashed on the crust of her second piece of pepperoni pizza, “But none of the other gyms are *hiring*… and I do *not* want to go back to Office Depot…”

Or anywhere else, for that matter. Riley loved exercising. She loved *helping* people to exercise! That was what she had thought she’d be getting back into when she started working at Rueben’s. But so far, all her job had been was her sitting on her butt all day while she watched people not exercise. Was it any wonder that she was so miserable?

“Oh lit, someone left a ranch cup over here…”

Riley didn’t have much say in what happened at her new job. After all, she was still in an entry-level position. But after six months of rapidly declining dedication to the place, she had at least learned to live with a few of the perks that came with working at a place like Rueben’s.

“Hmph… welffum—ulp—let’s see your membership card…”

Say what you want about working at other gyms, but only Rueben’s let you eat on the job.