MEL ROBBINS, a renowned expert on leadership and IHRSA 2019 keynote speaker, can help you achieve breakthrough performance in your career and life.
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Hesitation—between inspiration and taking action—is an obstacle to progress and success, contends IHRSA 2019 keynote speaker Mel Robbins, and overcoming it to move forward can be as simple as counting backwards from “5.” An author, analyst, entrepreneur, and personal development consultant, Robbins will explore “The Five-Second Rule” in her Technogym-sponsored address.

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Women Who INSPIRE!

CBI spotlights 20 exemplars—impressive women who have defined, and continue to shape, our industry

Women have always played a critical, primary role in the health and fitness club industry, and the number serving in top leadership roles has never been higher than it is today.

Acknowledging that achievement, and honoring their infinite accomplishments, CBI and IHRSA are pleased to present “Women Who Inspire!”

The following is a short and sincere, if obviously inadequate, tribute to 20 passionate, talented, highly experienced, and eminently successful individuals who have made an indelible impact on the industry and continue to do so today.

In the process, they have inspired countless others. These 20 serve as the representatives for countless others.

Each of the brief biographical sketches is followed by a comment from a close associate that captures a bit of the honoree’s special qualities and unique spirit.
Chantal Brodrick, Host  
The Fitness Business Podcast, Beecroft NSW, Australia

Chantal Brodrick gave up chasing more money, a bigger job title, and a successful, 15-year career in sales and marketing in the media industry after discovering her love for group fitness during a Les Mills BODYPUMP class. She became a certified personal trainer and group fitness instructor in 2008, and, then, a fitness business coach. In 2015, Brodrick took on the role of host of The Fitness Business Podcast, which provides education, information, and inspiration. Up to this point, the weekly podcast has produced more than 200 shows, has an audience of more than 100,000, and has yielded a total of 290,000 downloads. In addition to interviewing more than 250 fitness industry leaders, authors, and consultants, Brodrick has been a presenter at the IDEA World Fitness Convention; the IHRSA Women’s Leadership Summit, at the AB Show; the FILEX Business Summit; and the FITEX New Zealand Business Summit. “The fitness industry is like an avalanche; you can’t help but get carried away in the momentum,” she enthuses.

Melissa Christie, Director of Member Experience and Integration  
Newtown Athletic Club, Newtown, Pennsylvania

After working for Fortune 500 companies such as KPMG, Coca-Cola, and General Electric, Melissa Christie wanted a break from corporate America and a chance to channel her desire to make a direct impact on people’s lives. Joining the Newtown Athletic Club as a sales associate in 2011, she soon recognized the need to develop strong relationships with and properly integrate new members. Heeding the company’s mission of Making Lives Better, she began developing and implementing a program to on-board new members and reengage existing ones. That led to her assuming her current position in 2014. The resulting program involves members participating in a 90-day challenge that consists of a number of components, including a training session, a nutrition consultation, and an equipment orientation. It’s helped increase club utilization, drive ancillary revenues, and boost the club’s Net Promoter Score (NPS). Christie has shared this “best practice” at IHRSA and NEHRSA events, in webinars, and during sessions on customer engagement. She’s also developed the NAC Advocate Inner Circle, a group of “raving fans” who promote the club and receive special perks. “Bringing a smile to someone’s face and helping people become healthy are my rewards,” she explains.

Ginger Collins, Executive Director  
Gold’s Gym Franchisee Association, Suwanee, Georgia

Ginger Collins was among Gold’s Gym’s very first female franchisees when she opened two locations in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1989. “I was so scared, but I stepped into my new world and never looked back,” she recalls. Collins also served as the president of the Gold’s Gym Carolina Alliance from 1998 to 2004, but then sold her gyms and moved home to Georgia. The Gold’s Gym Franchisee Association (GGFA) created the position of executive director in 2005, and tapped her to fill it, serving as an advocate and resource for gym owners, providing educational...
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and networking events, webinars, small group chats, and more. The GGFA also vets prospective franchisees, collaborates with the Gold’s Gym executive team, and oversees the Gold’s Gym Challenge, a health and fitness transformation program that’s been conducted for 20 years. “I’m lucky to have been offered opportunities that were created for me, and the people I work with are family. It’s a supportive, tight-knit group,” she explains. —| Beth Gillespie, Sales and Marketing Director Saco Sport & Fitness, Saco, Maine

In 1994, approximately one year after Beth Gillespie and her husband, Scott, purchased Saco Sport & Fitness, the facility was completely destroyed by a fire. Exactly one year, one month, and one day after the fire occurred, they were able to reopen the club. Initially, Beth Gillespie worked on billing to “keep an eye on the money,” but has since worn a wide variety of hats. What she discovered was that her true passion was championing and facilitating members’ success. “There’s nothing better than helping them define their ‘why,’” she says. “Once the sale has taken place, our mission becomes to help them articulate and achieve their goals.” The club accomplishes this via consultations with the program coordinators, who are certified health coaches; through FeelSeeBe, a 90-day on-boarding program; with an extensive group exercise line-up; with its Tribe training; and more. A board member of the Saco Sport & Fitness Foundation, Gillespie also served for three years as the treasurer of NEHRSA’s board of directors. —|

“Empathetic, fun-loving, and disarming, with a great sense of humor, Beth is gifted at helping people feel at ease and inspiring them to take action.” —Scott Gillespie, Owner and CEO, Saco Sport & Fitness

Marisa Hoff, General Manager Stevenson Fitness, Oak Park, California

A former elementary school teacher and PTA president, Marisa Hoff was taking kickboxing classes and personal training sessions from Chris Stevenson in 2008 at his small fitness studio when he asked her to help out. She redesigned the club’s apparel, planned a new weight-loss program, and created a Facebook page for the business. Two years later, as Hoff obtained her group exercise instructor certification, Stevenson named her the operations manager of a new facility he was planning. She oversaw the buildout and construction, hired and trained all staff, and developed operational systems. “We thought we’d just have a bigger version of the former studio, but we accidentally opened a real health club,” she recalls. Since 2013, Hoff has served as the general manager of the full-service facility, consistently achieving a Net Promoter Score (NPS) in the 80s. She shares her knowledge and experience by presenting at numerous professional conferences, including IHRSA’s convention and trade show, NEHRSA, Club Industry, and the AB Show. —|

“Marisa has one of the strongest work ethics ever. She pays unbelievable attention to detail, gives more than expected, strives for perfection, and leads by example.” —Chris Stevenson, Owner, Stevenson Fitness
Ellen Koelsch, Owner, Vice President of Marketing and Membership
Club Fit, Briarcliff Manor and Jefferson Valley, New York

In the 1980s, Ellen Koelsch and her brother, Bill Beck, watched as their parents—with a little assistance from IHRSA—transformed what had been failing tennis clubs into thriving fitness facilities. Today, the two of them enthusiastically maintain the family tradition of prioritizing the importance of community and keeping on top of fitness innovation at Club Fit, which now has two locations. “We’ve always made relationships the cornerstone of our membership and staff experience, aiming to be a place where people feel supported and encouraged,” reflects Koelsch. That includes offering space for a local cancer support group, providing free weekly yoga classes, running membership campaigns that encourage new members to donate their enrollment fee to the local charity of their choice, and delivering a bottle of sparkling wine to the homes of 30-year members. “We’re a world apart from ‘fitness as usual,’ and, for more than 45 years, we’ve worked hard to create a space where our members get more out of every day.”

Pat Laus, Owner and CEO
The Atlantic Club, Manasquan and Red Bank, New Jersey

After 40 years of passionate dedication to, and efforts on behalf of, the fitness industry, Pat Laus isn’t slowing down. Starting her career as a registered nurse, Laus assumed ownership of her family’s failing 17-court racquetball facility in 1983. Since then, she’s transformed it into a world-class health club that, sitting on 44 acres, has 700 employees and serves more than 9,200 members. Now with two locations, The Atlantic Club includes two USTA tennis centers, an aquatics complex, a turf center, a youth sports training and conditioning complex, an early childhood learning center, and two day spas and salons. In 2006, Laus founded the Clubs for the Cure Team to promote community involvement among staff, members, and local residents; in 2007, this became Clubs for the Quest, an industry-wide effort to raise money for Augie’s Quest to Cure ALS. A multiple award winner—including IHRSA’s 2007 Distinguished Service and International Community Service Awards—Laus has presented at the IHRSA convention and trade show, and at the Medical Fitness Association (MFA) conference.

JoAnna Masloski, COO
The Wellbridge Company, Denver, Colorado

JoAnna Masloski joined The Wellbridge Company in 2000 as a fitness coach and quickly began making her mark. She became regional events and promotions coordinator in 2001, marketing manager in 2003, director of marketing in 2007, and vice president of marketing in 2010. She also was involved in launching new locations, implementing new sales and training processes, and designing strategies for retention management. In 2012, she left the company to become a minority owner and vice president of operations at Massage Retreat & Spa, a chain of seven stores based in New Hope, Minnesota. However, in 2015, Masloski was thrilled to return to Wellbridge as COO, and now oversees 19 premier athletic and tennis clubs in seven markets. Focusing on the organization’s vision of Believing in Better, she encourages...
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communication, receptivity to change, lasting relationships, and fun among team members, and fosters autonomy, empowerment, and motivation. “I strive to be a consistent reminder of what can be achieved through positivity, the seeking of opportunity, and passionate work.” —

Samantha Merchant, Assistant Executive Director, Personal Trainer The Works Health Club, Somersworth, New Hampshire

A presence at The Works since 2000, Samantha Merchant delights in “always challenging people in new ways to reach their goals.” Starting as a personal trainer and fitness director, Merchant has served as the club’s assistant executive director since 2014, overseeing operations and customer retention at the 70,000-square-foot facility, which boasts more than 8,000 members. In that capacity, she launched a biometrics screening program, a corporate wellness program, and a wellness practice that includes an insurance billing platform. She also deployed the Six Sigma DMAIC system to improve retention, which tripled new member enrollment in the onboarding program, and increased facility usage. In addition, she helped develop a medical weight management program, which surpassed its enrollment target by 110%, and its revenue goal by 200%. Merchant has presented at the IHRSA convention and trade show and the NEHRSA conference. She’s certified by ACE, NASM, and NSCA; and is an IHRSA Institute graduate, the former president of the NEHRSA board, and a member of the REX Roundtable. —

Moira Merrithew, Co-founder/Executive Director, Education Merrithew, Toronto, Canada

A graduate of the Bermuda School of Russian Ballet, and the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in London, Moira Merrithew enjoyed a successful career as a principal dancer with the City Ballet of Toronto and the Atlantic Ballet Company. When a lingering injury put an end to her professional dance career, Merrithew trained under Romana Kryzanowska at the original New York studio founded by Joseph Pilates, and, subsequently, became an instructor. Together with her husband, Lindsay G. Merrithew, she’s since spent more than three decades promoting responsible exercise through their company’s many brands—STOTT PILATES, Total Barre, Halo Training, ZEN*GA, and CORE Athletic Conditioning and Performance Training. Working with a wide range of experts, she oversees the creation of the comprehensive curricula and support materials for the firm’s education and certification programs, and serves as a performer in its extensive video series. She’s also a published author and presenter at numerous industry events, worldwide. —

“Relentless in pursuit of her goals, JoAnna has more energy than four or five people; is fearless, with a unique sense of adventure; and constantly seeks opportunities to learn.” —Jill Shusterman, East Regional Director, The Wellbridge Company

“Sam builds relationships on trust and respect, which makes her someone you can count on, and inspires you to go outside of your comfort zone and challenge yourself.” —Danielle Krenzer, Director of Programs, The Works Health Club

“Moira is extremely passionate about what she does, leads by example, and isn’t one to take a back seat—always offering valuable top-down guidance and support.” —Lesley Hopps, Vice President, Education, Merrithew
Paula Neubert, President/General Manager
Greenwood Athletic and Tennis Club, Greenwood Village, Colorado

As a college student, Paula Neubert launched her career in fitness by teaching step aerobics, using simple wooden boxes, while wearing leg warmers with matching belts and headbands. After college, she became an office manager at Elite Fitness, a personal training studio in Redondo Beach, California. She subsequently spent 11 years working for a local healthcare district in southern California, which involved helping to design and build fitness facilities, including a medically based center; a Pilates studio; and a 16,000-square-foot, kids-only club in Manhattan Beach. In 2002, she joined the Greenwood Athletic and Tennis Club as its program coordinator. A year later, she was named general manager. She now oversees the 153,000-square-foot club, situated on 13 acres, which has more than 7,500 members, and, during the summer, as many as 325 employees. “I love my job and enjoy my colleagues 100%—more than anything,” says Neubert. “Our team laughs every day, with big belly laughs, which makes any challenge or stressful situation much easier to manage.” Neubert also is a member of the Fitness Industry Advisory Council, and Clubs for the Quest.

Carole Oat, National Sales Manager
Twin Oaks Software, Berlin, Connecticut

An industry veteran with more than 34 years of experience, Carole Oat spent 15 years with Healthtrax International, Inc., in Glastonbury, Connecticut, progressing from the position of fitness trainer to that of senior director/general manager of large, multipurpose, recreational, sports, and fitness facilities. Capitalizing on an unexpected opportunity in 1999, Oat joined Twin Oaks Software to bring her operator’s expertise to bear on developing club management software and billing services. To date, she’s performed more than 300 data conversions and worked with hundreds of clubs, consulting on business plans, membership design and set-up, and staff coaching and training. “The outstanding team here is incredible in terms of its dedication, capabilities, service, and support,” she says of Twin Oaks. An IHRSA convention and trade show attendee for 25 years, Oat also is a former NEHRSA board member and the author of numerous industry articles. In addition, in 2017, she was inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame, in Norwich, Connecticut, for her achievements in tennis, golf, and softball.

Suzi Parker, President
Salem Athletic Club, Salem, New Hampshire

The mantra “All of life is change; growth is optional … choose wisely,” has guided Suzi Parker since 1976, when she and her husband opened the Manchester Court Club in Manchester, New Hampshire. Four years later, in 1980, they developed the Salem Athletic Club, which, initially, was a racquetball-only facility, but, in 1982, they added fitness, and, in 1985, an Olympic pool. This doubled the size of the facility, bringing it to 38,500 square feet. In 1995, she oversaw the conversion of four racquetball courts into a group exercise studio, cycling room, and cardio floor. Over the years, Parker has done everything from working the

“Paula inspires with her energy and passion, which cultivate one’s desire to achieve something special. She emanates confidence, but with humility, and truly appreciates others.” —Dan Gray, CFO, Greenwood Athletic and Tennis Club

“A dedicated and enthusiastic leader, Carole truly believes in the important contribution that clubs make to people’s health, and channels her passion into all she does.” —MJ Laliberte, Executive Vice President and General Manager, Twin Oaks Software

“Suzi has the courage to face each situation with a smile, and a willingness to learn, grow, try new things, and adapt. Members love her.” —Mike Chaet, Founder, Club Marketing & Management Services, Inc.
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front desk, to teaching group-ex classes, to managing the growing business. A former member of NEHRSA’s board of directors, she participates in the Rex Roundtables. She’s also served as president of the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire, honing her leadership skills by coordinating its presidential primary debates from 1980 to 1992.

Carleen Prentice, General Manager
Sunset Athletic Club, Beaverton, Oregon

Since 1998, Carleen Prentice has overseen the Sunset Athletic Club, helping the facility to grow from 55,000 square feet in size with 1,000 members, to 155,000 square feet with 2,300 members. For the past seven years, the club has enjoyed having a wait list. Starting in its Kids Korner in 1992, Prentice was named assistant manager in 1997, and, then, general manager. In that capacity, she oversees the full-service club, which includes, among its many amenities, an indoor aquatic center, two full-size basketball courts, an indoor track, a 40-foot climbing wall, a banquet room, a theater, a boardroom, and a bistro. “What we offer at our club has to change regularly to meet our members’ needs, but, ultimately, it’s our team that keeps people coming back,” she observes. Prentice thrives on promoting fitness as a way of bringing friends and family together to strengthen their relationships with one another. In her local community, Prentice has been recognized for her involvement in the Beaverton City Board and Planning Committee.

“With a keen eye for quality, Carleen recognizes talent and creates opportunities for growth. She’s a hands-on manager, taking on the toughest projects, and is skilled at defusing conflict.” —Chuck Richards, Owner, Sunset Athletic Club

Francesca Schuler, CEO
In-Shape Health Clubs, Stockton, California

Francesca Schuler has a wealth of experience—more than 25 years’ worth—in marketing. She’s served as the chief marketing officer (CMO) for BevMo!, a specialty beverage retailer, and of Treasury Wine Estates Americas. In 2015, she brought her skills to bear on the fitness industry when she became the CMO of In-Shape Health Clubs, a chain of 65 full-service clubs in California. Promoted to the position of COO in 2017, and CEO in 2018, Schuler has worked with her team to foster an employee- and member-centric culture to help realize the company’s mission—that of creating “places of belonging” that motivate people in their communities to stay healthy, fit, and happy. In 2014, she was honored as one of the San Francisco Business Times’ Most Influential Women in Business, and, in 2013, was presented with the Marketers That Matter Award for Customer Engagement. “There’s nothing more rewarding than unleashing the potential of a passionate team, and building an organization that gives people the opportunity to develop a career doing something they enjoy and find rewarding,” she observes.

“In addition to Francesca’s curiosity, intelligence, and dedication to her staff, she’s approachable, funny, and optimistic. She exceeds everyone’s expectations because she sets hers so high.”

—Rachelle Gardette, Regional Director, In-Shape Health Clubs

Laurie Smith, Senior Vice President, Operations
VillaSport Athletic Club and Spa, Beaverton, Oregon

Driven by her love of sports and a passion to make a difference in people’s lives, Laurie Smith has dedicated more than 30 years to the fitness industry. She began as a $5-per-hour tennis activities director at the Natick Racquet Club, in Natick, Massachusetts. She subsequently spent 20 years at Leisure Sports, Inc., in Pleasanton, California, which encompasses ClubSport and Renaissance ClubSport, serving in a number of capacities, including those of vice president of openings and acquisitions, and senior vice
president of operations and development. In 2011, Smith joined VillaSport Athletic Club and Spa, and, today, manages five large, multipurpose, resort-style clubs in California, Colorado, Texas, and Oregon, while, at the same time, overseeing the construction of two new clubs in California and Texas. She strives to have an impact, beyond fitness, on members by stressing social programming, and is committed to enhancing opportunities for employees. Smith is the former chairperson of the nominations committee for IHRSA’s board of directors, and serves on the judging panel for the association’s Julie Main Woman Leader Scholarship Award. —

Sharon Sporman, Administrative Director of Wellness (retired)
Franciscan Health Fitness Centers, Chesterton/Schererville, Indiana

Before retiring in June 2018, Sharon Sporman had spent more than 40 years owning, managing, educating, volunteering, and consulting within the health, fitness, and wellness industry. Since 1980, when she introduced aerobics and leg warmers to the Omni 41 Sports Complex, Sporman committed herself to the organization, through its multiple name changes, and its 1998 acquisition by the Franciscan Alliance. Today, the Franciscan Health Fitness Centers (FHFC) is a faith-based group of three locations that serve over 11,000 members. Sporman oversaw its two Indiana facilities and Franciscan WellCARE, an employee wellness program, and created the Northwest Indiana Wellness Council. As a Facility Lead Examiner for the Medical Fitness Association (MFA), she led the charge in earning the prestigious MFA certification for FHFC for the past six years, helping her staff meet the group’s high requirements. A member of IHRSA for 35 years, Sporman attended the association’s very first convention and trade show and has since returned many times. —

Patricia Totaro, Founder/Owner
Patricia Totaro Arquitetura de Resultados, São Paulo, Brazil

Patricia Totaro founded her firm in 1995 after graduating from the Universidade Presbiteriana Mackenzie, in São Paulo. She also holds an MBA in strategic and economic business management from Fundacão Getúlio Vargas, in Rio de Janeiro. Since 1998, Totaro has specialized in the design of gymnasiums, health clubs, sports centers, and spas, pursuing the goal of attracting people to fitness facilities via architecture. She’s managed a total of more than 180 projects, including the Unique Family Fitness Club, the Esporte Clube Pinheiros Gym, the EcoFit Club, the YMCA Brazil, and the Brucke Pilates network. Her business is an associate of the International Association of Sports and Leisure Architecture, and she’s an architectural consultant for the Brazilian Association of the Sports Industry. She’s contributed to the SECOVI Manual for the Sourcing of Sports Infrastructure Projects, and is a guest teacher for the Sports Education Network in post-graduate studies. She presents regularly at the IHRSA/Mercado Fitness Mexico City Conference and Trade Show, Mercado Fitness-Argentina, Brasilia Capital Fitness, and Sports Business. —

“Leading with heartfelt encouragement, Laurie embodies authenticity and integrity. She has the courage to think differently, be imperfect and vulnerable, question the status quo, and initiate change.” —Kim Sanders, Vice President, Operations, VillaSport Athletic Club and Spa

“Sharon has been a pioneer, expert collaborator, and visionary in the fitness industry for 40+ years. She leads with trust, genuine concern, a humble demeanor, sense of humor, and assertive approach to all matters, large or small.” —Marci Crozier, Administrative Director of Health Promotions, Franciscan Health Fitness Centers

“Patricia’s vision and pioneering approach, extensive experience, high standards, and the freedom she gives her staff inspire us to make a difference through innovative quality architecture.” —Igor Pietro, Architectural Urbanist, Patricia Totaro Arquitetura de Resultados
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Greta Wagner, Executive Director, Executive Vice President
Chelsea Piers Connecticut, Stamford, Connecticut

A 35-year fitness industry veteran, Greta Wagner began her career as a group exercise/dance teacher and personal trainer, and now supervises a massive, 565,000-square-foot, world-class health club and sports and athletic facility that, incredibly, hosts 1.6 million visits a year. During her 23 years with Chelsea Piers, she’s performed in a variety of roles, including that of senior vice president of the company’s New York facility; while there, she oversaw the firm’s management development program, and co-developed and directed customer service training for some 1,200 employees. She also played a major part in the extensive renovation of Chelsea Piers in 2012, following Hurricane Sandy, overseeing hundreds of workers and vendors, and completing six months’ worth of construction in just 30 days. Wagner is a member of IHRSA’s Industry Leadership Council (ILC), and of the Society of Human Resources Management. She’s also a participant in the RT1 Faust executive group, and a board member of The Chelsea Piers Scholarship Fund.

“Impiring by example and commitment, Greta is honest and caring, and truly understands what excellence means, applying that standard to every aspect of her life.” —David Tewksbury, Managing Partner, Chelsea Piers; President, Chelsea Piers Fitness

Janine Williams, Vice President of Human Resources
Leisure Sports, Pleasanton, California

A 30-year fitness industry veteran, Janine Williams earned a B.A. in physical education from the University of California, Berkeley, and an M.S. in kinesiology from Cal State Hayward. She joined Leisure Sports in 1991 as the general manager of its recently opened ClubSport Fremont. In 1994, she was named the vice president of operations for all ClubSport properties in California, Oregon, and Nevada. Since 2005, she’s served as the company’s vice president of human resources, with an emphasis on training and development. She also oversees risk management for employees, general liability, and personal injury. Certified as a senior professional through the Society of Human Resources Management, she has 16 years of experience as a Talent Plus Master Analyst and Diplomat in talent selection and assessment processes. In addition, Williams serves as a state lobbyist, and has worked tirelessly with IHRSA to provide input on proposed legislation for the health club industry.

“Janine has a core belief in fairness and a strong intellectual curiosity. She possesses excellent skill sets and inspires tremendous loyalty in everyone she works with.” —Patrick O’Brien, CFO, Leisure Sports

— Julie King, julie.king1@comcast.net

Women Empowering Women at IHRSA 2019

The 10th Annual Women’s Leadership Summit, the premier annual gathering for professional women working in the health and fitness club industry, will take place on Wednesday, March 13, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m., during IHRSA’s 38th Annual International Convention & Trade Show, in San Diego. This unique educational and networking event is generously sponsored by Club Automation. For details, go to ihrsa.org/convention.