

# Group Fitness Real Talk

## EP09: The Secret to Longevity as a Group Fitness Instructor with Les Mills legend Bevan James Eyles

### **Bevan**

Do you see yourself as a Pied Piper, you know, do you see to see the influence that you have on the world and then take responsibility with it, but then just think of how you can flourish there. Because that's what's cool. But when we go back to that thing of we have respect, once you understand it in you see that we're Pied Pipers, what a cool opportunity there is in a life, you know, and so like, you know, don't get to the end of your career and go, gosh, I missed that opportunity. It's like, to me that, you know, like, we make people's lives better. We help people discover, you know, the greatest compliment we get, what I get is when someone says, I'm better at home, I'm better at work. I'm just a better version of me because of this fitness thing we've added. You know, we're so lucky. So just make sure you embrace it, enhance it in your own life.

### **Will:**

Hey, I'm Will Brereton, founder of Sh1ft Fitness. And this is Group Fitness Real Talk, a show about how to survive and even thrive as an instructor in 2020 and beyond. What is the secret to longevity as a group fitness instructor? That's the million dollar question. And if anyone's going to be able to answer it, it's this week's podcast guest, Bevan James Eyles. Bevin is a really good friend of mine. We've known each other for 20 years, like you're going to hear in the podcast. And he was one of my absolute biggest role models when I came into group fitness instructing. He delivers energy, expression, excitement in every class, and he has done it to every class I've ever seen him teach. He's also built a number of successful businesses outside of instructing while continuing on with building communities as you're going to hear. David has been teaching for a long time. And one of the things I love most about him is that he's still just as passionate about it now and gets as much joy out of teaching today, as he did 20 years ago when I first met him. So what's his secret? Today, Vivian is going to talk you through how he sees the group fitness industry right now. And what he thinks is the single most important thing that you need to be doing to succeed. He also gives some amazing advice on what you can do right now to ensure that you are still getting joy out of teaching, and that you continue to get it for many years to come. Whether you've been teaching for decades, or you're just starting your growth in his career, Bevan has so much wisdom to impart. So onto the episode. Bvan James Eyles, welcome to the show. How are you?

### **Bevan**

I'm very good. Thank you for having me.

### **Will:**

I'm really excited to have you on actually, anyone that's enjoying the show should know that Devin was the first person I reached out to and I decided that I want to do a podcast, because I know that you've been doing them for how long now?

**Bevan**

Well, yeah, I said my first one in 2006. So a long, long time, when I started, half your job was explaining what a podcast was. Yeah. So you know...Well, I started my triathlon one, and it was in 2006. And then I started my own show in 2013.

**Will:**

Oh, wow. So you're like old school? Yeah, really. I'm jumping on the bandwagon, really late. So, for anybody listening to this, Bev and I come from the same city in New Zealand. And I actually did the math on this right before we caught up. And I realized that I went to my first body tech class with you in the summer of 2000, which means that we've officially known each other for 20 years.

**Bevan**

And I often tell that story. One time I was in Spain in a swimming pool in Spain. Will and I had done some work together about a month earlier. And Will hadn't told me he was going to Spain. And I was on holiday in Spain, and out of nowhere and the swimming pool in Spain is Will, like in the whole world? What are the chances? It was mind blowing?

**Will:**

It happens more often than you'd expect. If you're a kiwi, I would say for anyone listening to this around the world. So I wanted to get you on because I have had many conversations with you over the last 20 years about instructing and all manner of things and you are a fount of wisdom. And so I thought I just get you on and see what currently is on your mind with the way the world is now that will be relevant to group fitness instructors or people that are in the fitness industry.

**Bevan**

I think we live in a very interesting time with the fitness industry in regards to group fitness because it's the first time that technology is a real threat. You know, I think that in the past the tools weren't there. The capability for people to actually use technology to build an audience wasn't really there. You know, so it was COVID in some ways as fast forward a lot of the ability for everyday people to build an audience. But also like when this is being recorded it was just announced that they aren't going to do indoor fitness, which I think is a real game changer for a lot of the big players in the industry and I think a lot of them are crapping their pants right now because they've just got so much money. They what they're doing with Apple One is a kind of a subscription model, right? Yes, your music. Yeah, health, news. And it's a very cheap price point. Yeah. So I think it's just a great. Very interesting moment for group fitness. And what is our, you know, for the traditional group fitness instructor, what is their role moving forward. And I also think it's gonna be really hard to compete for a lot of, you know, everyday people on the internet. And so I think there's some really I do think there's some solutions on everything, some things that we need to be thinking about in regards to this. But I just think we live in a fascinating time with fitness. And I do think some of the big players may get swallowed up pretty quickly. Yeah, because the thing with Apple is they've got so much money. Yeah, you know, and the big players in our game are big players in our game, but in comparison to like an Apple. It's a gamechanger.

**Will:**

The way I think about Apple fitness plus is that Apple that like, there's really high barriers to entry, because they're only opening it up to people with Apple watches. So that's already a very small subsection of the population. But there's just so many people that have bought into Apple, that it can just swallow up a massive percentage of that Venn diagram where you have people that are into fitness, people that are into tech, and that crossover, Apples' just going to swallow it up. And I'd say that the peloton and other companies probably set within that part of the Venn diagram as well. But you know, a whole lot of the world is on Android. And what I've seen with instructors going virtual is that the people that are going to individual instructors, the ones that we work with are going there for the rapport and the support and the knowing the person one on one, which is something that you'd never get from the apples, because they're just not able to facilitate that kind of interaction from trainer to person. I can do it a little bit, but not in depth. But if yeah, if I was a big kind of fitness aggregator, I would be pretty worried.

**Bevan**

Yeah, and I agree, I actually think the solution, because I'm still fundamentally, while I think there's a place for the internet, I still fundamentally believe your ultimate goal in a fitness career should be to be a leader in your community. Yep. And I know nowadays, everyone is chasing the online dollar. I think what you're gonna find with the online dollar is, it's a 1% game. So there will be somebody who make a lot of money with the online dollar. But I think there's gonna be a lot of people, it's like trying to be YouTube star. Everyone wants to be a YouTube star, you know, 100 people, may make it on youtube, if you get what I mean? Yeah, relatively me, people are trying. And so I think that is a real, you know, when we think about where you spend your time, to me, I think ultimately, a great career in fitness can just be and ultimately maybe be the best path forward is just to be an amazing community leader within your region, and there could be online products that sit on top of that you've learned about how you know that, you know, you can't have an online presence, but ultimately, you've got to have rapport. And I think you're gonna have more rapport, generally speaking with the people that you can build within your own community, and you give touch points in the real world. And ultimately, there's just an online product that sits alongside it, that add convenience, adds the ability for people to choose and all those other things that online can offer. But, you know, like, to me, like, I've built a business around community. And it's, it's, we're so successful, because the community, I just think that is a fitness leader. I think ultimately, the if we think of the foundations of how you build your career, one of the biggest things all of us need to think about is what am I doing to nurture community. And when we think about community, I one thing, I think that's something I've thought about for a long time. So in Christchurch, we had the earthquakes in 2011. And it was a really fascinating moment, because the new earthquakes, the gyms that I worked Les Mills' in Christchurch all got shut down for probably a four or five month period, there's this big gap where the gyms are closed.

**Will:**

Right so it's not that different from COVID in the Northern Hemisphere, right? Because in New Zealand, you didn't have quite such a big lockdown. But there are places like in the UK, we've just hit some more rules. Fortunately, fitness facilities are okay for the time being. But yeah, I hadn't actually put two and two together on there, but that you experienced that full closure that that a lot of people in the Northern Hemisphere have just gone through.

**Bevan**

And it was really, it was probably one of the biggest learning moments in my career because it was really fascinating because I was a successful instructor at my gym, I was a big numbers puller. And so when when it happened, I created this product called quite workouts and quite workouts was outdoor training. It was team training, outdoor, you know, you know, pretty standard outdoor training. But it was really successful because it was just the people who had come to my classes. So you get like 100 people coming along to do these outdoor workouts. And what was really fascinating was none of them knew each other. So these people would exercise next to each other for years.

**Will:**

I went to your class at the start of this year and I recognize a whole lot of faces from 20 years ago.

**Bevan**

Yeah. And then these people would so these people would exercise, often three times a week standing next to the same person. And none of them knew each other. And in quake workouts. By the end of it, they created friendships. And it was a really interesting insight for me because it was like, Oh, this is what we do at Les Mills is a pretty great thing. But there's really big barriers to creating community. So for example, what are the what are the barriers? Well, first of all, music is awesome. But music doesn't necessarily in a way that Les Mills creates workouts, allow us to build connections with members between each other. And I suppose I'll take a step back there. Because when I think about community, there's a lot of instructors who are great connectors with people. But often, like in crisis, we have an instructor called Suli. And he is like the ultimate connector of all time. Yeah. And now, the thing with Suli, although he does do a little bit of what I'm talking about is that people are connected to Suli. Like, I'm a good connector people connected to me. But ultimately, we're trying to build community what we're trying to do to build relationships between

**Will:**

Right, connect with each other rather than everybody focused on the front.

**Bevan**

Yeah, and so like in group fitness, you've got music, which helps, you know, which doesn't help the connections, ultimately, with the person in front of them, right. So there's all these problems of group fitness, it actually doesn't create community. And when the quake workouts happened, and I was like, at the end of it, so many of them come to me said, I love this the time because I actually know that people have been training needs to for 10 years of my life. And it really influenced when I've got a running business. And it really influenced how I design my running business. And one of the biggest things we do with our running business is our job is to build community. So if you look at our running group, if you go on their Facebook page of the individuals in our group, or their friends or near our runners, right, you know, and that's not me, they haven't fallen in love with me, they've fallen in love with our community. And I think that's really Sh1ft for you. And we put a really successful business around this and because the thing is, if you're in a community, you want to be there. Yet belonging is ultimately the biggest thing now what what a lot of the fitness products do is the belongingness to the workout or the instructor, right? So like a Soul Cycle, you feel like the identity to the workout equinox, you feel like identity to the to the kind of the brand that they represent. CrossFit, you know, you know, so it's the workout is their belonging, and it's not a bad thing. You do they belong to work, it's a really powerful thing, to the instructors are really powerful thing as well. But to me, if you want to build a really successful career, in your local region where you can make a good living from it, you've actually got to build a community with the people are the community. And again, if I look at my running business, you know, we've got a

product, which is designed for total beginners, someone 45, quite overweight, has an excise between years, we have a 90% success rate with these people.

**Will:**

When you success rate, what does that mean? That they continue on to another product or another...

**Bevan**

-- there's two things so that we product. So our success rate is do they finish and succeed. You know, so we're trying to hit the target mark, the hardest market in the market, unfit, overweight? Older people who are insecure. Yeah, then we have 90% of them achieve the goal. And most of them stay on with us. Now the there's lots of work done to make them be successful. But the number one thing is you build friendships,

**Will:**

Right.

**Bevan**

And a good example of it, that last Saturday, our latest group's three weeks into it, and latest groups into it. And as I was kind of coaching, and one of the ladies, they finished a little bit earlier, and also at the coaching one of the ladies drove up next to me. She said, given I've got an idea, I've got an idea for you. She's been with us for three weeks. I said, What's your idea. She goes, you need to do a movie about the running group, kind of like the joy lock book club or something like it? Yeah, yeah. It was an ultimate compliment. Because what she was saying to me was, I feel belonging to the people in the group. Mm hmm. Now, when you feel belonging to the people in the group, what are you going to do? You're going to be turned up? Yeah. And you're going to, you know, stay with that group. And so I think that the role of the fitness professionals, particularly in this time, we're, we're in such a time of change. Yeah, is it you need to see yourself as a community builder. Yeah. And And again, if we redefine that, what is community building, it's, your job is to build the relationships of the people in your group.

**Will:**

That's really interesting. And I've talked a lot about community, but I've never really actually thought about it and sort of deconstructed it from that perspective, where, as an instructor, you really are kind of delivering a class and connecting with all of those individuals. But you're right, it's the connections between the class that really strengthens the bonds and keeps people coming back. Which is which now more than ever, is something that people are really struggling with and liking.

**Bevan**

Well, let's be honest, like I'm not a religious person and so be it, but but one of the things that church does amazingly is community. Yeah. And and if we look at what's happened in the world in the last period of time, is people have become time poor. Yeah. So even look at sports clubs, like we are the biggest running club in New Zealand. And we're a paid product and we're premium pay product. Now, why is it? Well, one of the reasons is, is that all the running clubs, that's done by about two or three people to do everything, yes, it is it logistical side of it, but people don't have time to give back now. Back in the days when running clubs are huge, you know you're in a club, but you're also you do the round. But also every couple weekends, you do marshaling, you'd give back. And so what's happened is we don't have time to give back. So these communities, now I know we can talk about community

online communities, but people need people. Yeah. And so these communities where you actually have like the church, like sports clubs, they're dying because, we just don't have time to give back.

**Will:**

Right. I remember doing like Sir Martins Harriers, and you'd have all the parents and friends and I used to do surf club and we'd go down at South Brighton, and everyone would be pitching in on the weekends. And yeah, I just can't even fathom that now. And I guess, I it's interesting, because I've obviously moved to London, where it's much more fast paced, but you're saying that, you know, it's happening in Christchurch, which is, you know, on in New Zealand and some weather, maybe because of my background, I thought was still similar to what it was when I grew up.

**Bevan**

But it's really not. And I think that's the thing is it, we need to understand. And the thing is, again, we're the biggest running club in New Zealand, and we charge like 100 times more than every running club. And so when you think about that, the thing people are willing to do is they're willing to pay for community. Yeah, because people don't want to give the time. So the kind of deal that we have is we'll look after everything, you just have to turn up in a position, you know, so like, we've created a really professional product, where they give us some money, but we look at all the work so they don't feel guilty about not giving back. Yeah, but they can get the value of being community. And I would even argue in a place like London, people still need people.

**Will:**

Oh, I completely agree with you. I think it's a need. It's just, I think it's a need, that's even harder to meet because of like the burdens of tribal and yeah like the time corners, when you add on like commute, if you live slightly outside of London, it's just adding that additional kind of hour, half an hour to an hour each in. Okay, so this is, this is great, because I think you've hit the crux of the change that fitness instructors can be in the world. And yeah, and I totally agree with you that it's like in person is absolutely the most fundamentally important pace that they can be. And we talk a lot about a lot about online, just because right now, that's the only option for a lot of people. But I think the ideal situation is having online as something that assists what you're doing actually in person. So if think about community being kind of the thing that you have realized is the most essential thing for your career as an instructor, as a leader in the community. How do you build it? What's the secret sauce that you've created that allowed you to build that community?

**Bevan**

So I think first is that having that mindset of I am building community. You know, it's, yeah, totally, you know, and because I love the idea of the questions you put in your mind you find great solutions to. And so once I start to see myself as a community builder, your mind will come up with great innovation in great ways to consecrate that. So I think, first of all, the one thing we need to shift is when I walk into a room, or as I turn up to the park, or wherever my fitness facility is, is my job is to create community. And so that will help you first of all, start to think about the opportunity to create community. So like, there's some ways we can do this, like, obviously, the pre class experience. So you know, in the past, the belts, people were waiting around for me, I just walk up and talk to each person. Yeah, nowadays, I grab people together. I've started a conversation. Yeah. And then I walk away. Yep. You know, so just like little little bits like that are really important. So I think the first thing you've got to go is my, how do I look at the world in a way that helps me build community. And so that's the first thing and is looking for as conscious moments where you can just create human connection. Yeah, the hardest thing is the first

point of human connection. So first, people feel a bit awkward. And it's nice for you to be the breakdown, because they will stand next to each other and be quite common. And, you know, interesting. But the hardest part is getting to do that. So so the first thing is you can be the person who leads it. So I will literally go up to people and say, just get on the topic, and I'll just pull the next person into the conversation.

**Will:**

Yeah, yeah. Cuz you know them, you know their name, you know something about them. And you can be the guy.

**Bevan**

yeah. And once they're talking, I'll get out of there. Because then I'm going okay, where's my next community to build? Where's my next people?

**Will:**

And do you find that tough now cuz I think of all the times that I obviously went for classpass. And I've been to so many group fitness classes, different places, the number of times I've been somewhere new, and I've I've just been glued to my phone because I'm nervous. Like, I'm a self confident person. But I'm not like,

**Bevan**

it's really fascinating because you're self confident even you do that.

**Will:**

Yeah, for sure. Like, I'll be on my phone, I'll be looking at my phone. I'll be pretending to text someone and I'll just be wasting time so that I don't have to interact because I'm nervous. How do you like, do you find that a problem and what do you do to get over it?

**Bevan**

I don't because I don't have a problem with people. But I get from people who be shy that were maybe a bit of a challenge.

**Will:**

Oh, I meaning if you have people in your class that are like me, and they're glued to their phone. Do you strike up a conversation approach them?

**Bevan**

Yes. I just approach them. Yeah, I fundamentally, I'm a real people person, which helps. I think they want to connect. Yeah. And I think the other thing I think it's really important thing to remember, this is one thing I learned early on, because I'm a really interesting story because I was a dropkick. Like I was like, druggie, elkie turned my life around. And what's really interesting about my story is I was literally I was like, the scum of the scum, at 19 I was the scum of scum. I had a bad drug experience, found myself, started to develop myself, found fitness luckily. Within 18 months of being a successful fitness person. Now, what's really interesting about that moment in my life, is I got a lot of respect from the world. Because I was good at the thing, the thing that most people suck it. We're not going to fitness. Everyone wanted to listen to what I had to say. Yeah, the other thing was, I wasn't actually that

developed as a person, I didn't actually have much to offer. And if you looked at me, no one wanted to listen to me at all.

**Will:**

I knew you around this time, Bev. You had you had so much energy and enthusiasm, which you've always had, but yeah, you're probably right. Like, when I think of you as the person you are today, and you as the person you were when I met you -- worlds apart.

**Bevan**

I was like, Okay, if you'd meet me at Monterey, no one, even my friends were the lowest of the low. And nobody listened to me, you know, like I was, you know, I wasn't, I had no respect. But then I found fitness and fitness is a funny thing, because we are good at the thing that most of the world sucks at. And so for that reason, we get a disproportionate amount of respect.

**Will:**

When you say, good at the thing you mean, like standing up and delivering it?

**Bevan**

Yep. Just, but even exercising?

**Will:**

Yeah, actually. Yeah, you're right. I totally forget, because I spent so much time working with fit pros. That that is like the bulk of the people in the world don't do fitness period.

**Bevan**

Yeah, yeah. And not just like do it. Like shit scared of it. We are good at the thing that most people suck it in. And the irony is, we don't find it hard. You know, I'd like for you to do exercise, do you ever go oh my god, I can't do exercise for a month? You know, like, we might have the odd day but and we'd like to push ourselves. But the idea of the starting isn't hard for us now. So they put their context on us. Yeah. So when they say yes, to doing exercise, they think oh, my god, these guys must be working so hard, because I find it so hard. Right? But it's not true. It's like brushing your teeth for us. So for that in mind, we get a really, really huge amount of respect from the public. Secondly, we also are people who stand in front of people. And it's another area where people say they'd rather die than public speaking, which is true, but you know, it's so so they look up to us. And we forget it. Yeah. And for me, you know, I remember, there's a moment in my late 20s, when I realized, I'm a Pied Piper. Yeah. In my position, and because I'm good at the thing that most people are bad at. I have an ability to influence. And to me, there's a responsibility that comes with it. And so like, if I want to build community, and I walk in a room, and if someone on the phone who doesn't know? Well, I'm the leader.

**Will:**

Right. It's your, it's your responsibility to bring them in. And you're totally right. It's that like, for example, when I'm using the example of myself, if the instructor comes up and starts talking to me, phone goes down, like I'm looking for an excuse to interact. I'm just too nervous to be the one to do it.

**Bevan**

Yeah!



**Will:**

Obviously, when I'm in the reverse position, and I'll go out of my way.

**Bevan**

Yeah, totally. And that's the thing is that, like, it's amazing. It's amazing how you can just have such an impact by being that person, you know, and in finding the right approach, obviously gonna have trouble way but but we're instructors we get here to do it. Um, so for me, I think that's First of all, it's just, it's your responsibility. I suppose I'm sick of some other things to think about community and it is a bit of that kind of, how do you build a cult stuff? Yeah. So identity. So I use a lot of identity statements. And it is, you know, being a part of this group means that, you know, so like, you know, when I teach a pump class, I teach pump. relentlessly hard.

**Bevan**

Because because I just think pumps a boring workout if you don't,

**Will:**

Yeah, you're not gonna get an argument for me.

**Bevan**

You know what I mean? Like, pump's boring. And if you've got if you got a stock standard weight on, just going through the motion. Yeah, you took a box, but you're not satisfied. To me, the glory of pump is 30 seconds. Go, you're dying and you push through. Right, you know, they talk about pump, the instructor needs to bleed. So I never go light. You know, but you know what I mean?

**Will:**

Yeah. I remember one of maybe when you do your one of your first pump classes with Jeff and you put about 20 kg on for the chest press.

**Bevan**

But, so for me when I teach pump, and I teach it, and I teach it, unapologetically, I teach it, you know, very directive. But I also say, Thursday morning pumpers, you guys love to work hard! So I'm using identity statements. You know, the people who get up in the morning is time, I love that you guys always tune up, always deliver, I love how this person here pushes on, on what I'm doing is I'm creating a sense of a means to be something in this workout. And you know, and so people will know, going to business class means this, but it also means I'm the kind of person and like, let's be honest, that's what CrossFit does so well.

**Will:**

Yeah, for sure.

**Bevan**

You know, it's that sense of identity around the workout.

**Will:**

One thing that you've always done that is always impressed me is that you're always very thoughtful about the things you say, and the like lines that you use in your class. They sometimes they sound throw away, but you're doing them quite deliberately for a purpose. So do you do you pre script the

things? Or do you think about the the identity words that you're going to use before you go in? Do they I guess they just come naturally now. But was there a time when you genuinely put some thought into it?

**Bevan**

Honestly, I am more of a spontaneous person. I, but I think the thing I have is I understand the key thought, so so you know, I understand I'm trying to give these people the sense of they belong to a workout that's tough. So then, because I know that's the like, I love teaching the cycle classes. And the reason I love the song classes because the workout's nothing. So all you're doing is getting inside of their head.

**Will:**

Nothing is as in nothing to think about. You're just turning your feet.

**Bevan**

is so simple. Yeah, they it's really a head experience. Yeah. And so you know, so I don't necessarily go into where you're going today, I want to talk about this. I just know moments, and for me things, those things will appear. But it's so maybe when you're you may want to go in with these ideas of the things you want to create. But for me, it's more I, here's the thing I want to explore, and then the moment they'll pop up.

**Will:**

And so that's what you do for your pump class. What do you do for your runners? Like for your new sort of the people that you're talking about before? The people who are over 45? A bit overweight? are scared of fitness? What identity statements do you use with them?

**Bevan**

So I do a lot of rewarding the behavior we love. So I do a lot of, I love the way you guys are so supportive of each other. Yeah, you know, stuff like that, because what they needed support. I saw so and so today, I love how they were able to manage their intensity. Yeah, you know, stuff like that. So you what you're doing is you're, you're praising the behavior that you want to see from the people in the group, right?

**Will:**

And then they get that reinforced that that's the behavior that belongs here. And that like is an expectation, but also reward and that if you're doing that you're part of the community, you identify with everybody else.

**Bevan**

But it's a really interesting question. What is culture? And to me, I think culture, there's lots of definitions. But one, one, the way I look at culture is culture is when I step in that environment is behaviors I do. You know, you know, because let's be honest, there's versions of us that are crap versions because of the environment we go into. Yeah, you know, you know, you might be that when you go out in the press with your mates, you actually don't like that version of yourself that much. And in this, these cultures, where you walk into an is just a higher version of yourself. So you know, and so what I think about is in building my coaches, first of all, what is each culture like, represent? And then when people walk into this world, we don't tell them the culture, right? But the behaviors of the culture in the people in the environment, kind of just pick up on it, and they become that version of themselves.

Well, no, because that's what I love. Because we're creating worlds. You know, and openly, what we're trying to do is create worlds where people are successful. And so, you know, that's where you kind of take a step back and look at your world and go, what are we doing to actually create these cultures that actually going to bring the best out and people? You know, like, I know, running group, it's actually not a competitive running group. Now, this is not to say people don't want to beat people. But But ultimately, our running group is you get better or helping other people get better. Yeah. It actually is an example of you in my career, because you're really good president. Okay, well, no, you are because there's, you know, so when I saw him bodytech videos, that was back in the days where roughly his nose I don't know if he obviously is more global audience. But Les Mills had these videos are pretty big and getting on one's a big thing. And when I first started on it, it was at a time where they just use the same people all the time. And so for my first period, it was just me and two other people, were you kind of just sort of next 20 years, I'm gonna be it's gonna be me and two other people. And then the game changed. And I started using lots of different people, and it was the right thing to do. But it was definitely an insecure moment for me because like, Well, where am I in this?.

**Will:**

Yeah. You had reached that point. And then suddenly, it wasn't like it was quite so yeah.

**Bevan**

But to be honest, bigger car dealership that I was, I kind of still felt I was the best, you know, like I still felt that you know I'm the best instructor there is. And then you came onto the DVD and the first DVD you did, I was like, oh, wow, there's another level.

**Will:**

Oh, thanks.

**Bevan**

No, seriously, you, you're brilliant. And in the insecure side of me want to push you down. No, no, I didn't know, I was aware of it. And I wanted to pick on some of the things that maybe weren't so strong in or, or, you know, just insecure thoughts say? Now I caught it. And my approach was, okay, well, I can try bring world down because I don't, I'm threatened. Yep. Or I can use him to show me another level. And, you know, ultimately, that's what I did was like, Will's lifted the game, I need to lift the game myself. You know, and in my running group, that's what we are, we are, you don't need to shit on other people, because we will try to get even higher. And I'll be honest, like, in the last month is not good. Dan, has anybody taken his last video? I think the best ever, You know, I think the way presented in the last video is the best to instructing I have ever seen. It's surpassed anything I've ever done. Now, do I get another opportunity moving forward? Maybe? Will I get that level? I'll be aiming for it. But you know, so things like their own culture? So what are you, what's the culture you're creating for your world that people will just subconsciously pick up on and become

**Will:**

Right and it has to start with you, right? Because I think that as as an instructor, as a person that puts yourself in front of other people and has to give a lot of your you know, there has to be some ego there to create this persona that you're delivering to other people. The The downside of that is that it can you can be quite insecure, when you see someone that's better than you're doing it better. And they're like, you're absolutely right. There's like that internal saboteur that can kind of start to pick it, the things they're about other people that you may be a little bit jealous of and start to tear them down. And that

that has a terrible effect on community because you can't go community unless you're lifting everybody up.

**Bevan**

Yeah, totally.

**Will:**

Yeah, it's easy to fall into really easy.

**Bevan**

Well it's insecurity and we have insecurities, especially like in the world that we're in, or that I was in you were, there's limited opportunity. And so you know, it is a real threat when someone comes along because it really, quite often means you're gone. You know, there's a lot of people have been the stars in our world. And this isn't just Les Mills, it's the fitness world. Yeah. You know, so. So then, how do you deal with it? And ultimately, I think you go back to, well I'm here to help people.

**Will:**

Yeah, that's really interesting. Actually, I'm really glad that you brought up kind of this line of conversation, because you were I mean, you've been with Les Mills for like what over 20 years, you've done everything traveled all around the world, train people around the world been on hundreds, not hundreds but 10s of DVDs. Um, you've kind of done it. All right, you've achieved the absolute maximum of what you can achieve in that sphere. And you've moved into something else that is obviously like fulfilling and making you happy. When did you kind of realize that there was life outside of the specific fitness thing that you were doing?

**Bevan**

I think I think one thing that's really important, especially if you want to have a lifetime career and fitness, I think it's a few things. First of all, you've got an in business. Yep. And so when did it hit me two times, even for me, early on in my career. I got asked to go to Japan. And I was under the Foos picture of I do for Les Mills. I was really excited. And then the manager Jim crushed him said no, I couldn't because I was too important to the crush it gym. And it really, you know, that really was like, wow, you know, like, his talk about being limited. Yeah. And then secondly, I went to the states and about 2003 for three or four months. And everybody above me was unhappy.

**Will:**

Right.

**Bevan**

And it was all wow, okay, so you need to build another life. Yeah. Because you know, if the people above me are unhappy, is this the life I want? And so for me, it was very much. And I'll be very lucky because I still am Les Mills, I still love Les Mills. And I try to do great work on Les Mills. But it's just a part of my life. Whereas at that moment in my life, it was almost everything. And so so I do think it's important for and let's be honest, that part of the fitness world as a young man's game, a young person's game, you know, like, I'm 43 I might have a couple more DVDs on me. But 10 years from now, I'm not doing what doing DVDs? Yes, you know, and so. And so if you don't create another path, you will not survive in that world at least. Yeah. And the other thing I think about as a fitness career is two things. I want a fitness career where I'm not desperately trying to hold on to a fitness career.

**Will:**

Yeah. So yeah, where that's not based upon something that is slowly falling from your grasp as you age because the reality is like it We've been in this game a long time, I can't jump the way I used to do I can't do any of that stuff. I can do other stuff much better than I used to. But there's certain things that I just hard as you get older.

**Bevan**

Yeah, yeah. And so ultimately, this is probably more for people on the younger side of things. And also, so I want a career that, you know, they're not desperately holding on to. But also, I just want to think about how to help people. Yeah, you know, so if I'm feeling desperate, holding on to my career, I can't put my mind space into how to help people. Yeah. And so you know, it's like, I want to give myself as much opportunity within a week to spend time problem solving, evolution of helping other people. And so I think there's a few things that we think about career. I think, first of all, a) you've got to get into the first stages and just actually make your career? I think it is worth building a strong brand within your name. It's something I've kind of done well, you know, your name means something in your community, like in Christchurch. When people talk about fitness mine's, one of the names it's going to come up. You know what I mean like if people do it fitness are probably talking about Bevan. Now, I'm not the only name, there's other great fitness professionals in Christchurch, but in my community, my name is going to come up. So it's got a it's got a good reputation. I think ultimately you've got to learn business. Because the fitness industry is a passion game. And passion games are really interesting, because passion games, it's a 1% market. Yeah, so question games. 1% of the people make the money. And everyone else is hoping to make the dream. You know what I mean? And so really, what you've got to do is you've got to have some kind of business scenes. And because, you know, when I hit that moment, around 2003, about three, couple years later, I started my running business. Yeah, now I've got a running business, it's a good business provides a great lifestyle, awesome, invested wisely when I was younger, as well. So now at 40, we are a lot of people my age in the industry are shitting themselves and trying to look for careers elsewhere. And yeah, you know, I've got a, I can say, a fitness forever, you know, so. And so learning a business, and you don't have to be bloody Bill Gates, but, you know, I know if your product, your products, really great product, because people can actually build a little business around what they're doing and learning. You know, your basic customer service learning, some marketing, learning, you know, all those things, and asking for what you're worth. You know, like, like, I'm my running product as a premium product. We're not cheap. But we're a great product. And, you know, and if we want to help more people, I need money for marketing to...

**Will:**

you know, and that's a, that's a really, really interesting thing that kind of brings us back to the top of the discussion, right, because you've got Apple that are about to release Apple fitness plus for \$9.95 for a monthly subscription, right? US, so who knows what will be around the world, but that's the price point in US dollars. And if you're a an instructor who's you know, delivering classes, either in person online or whatever, that's not enough to sustain you. Like, you have to charge more than that. And so, but there are ways for you to justify that, which is all the other stuff you talked about, right? It's there, creating community creating a place for people to go, and creating that value that a large organization that is doing it for the numbers and volume just can't do.

**Bevan**

Yeah. And also, don't be afraid to be a premium product. Mm hmm. You know, I do like the niche, you know, like, we have just, we just do running. Yeah, we don't try to do anything else to do like trying to be nice to a specific market. But, you know, be a premium product, you know, now, then you might go but I want to help people who can't afford a premium product. And I have to admit, it's kind of the next stage in my career. And I do want to kind of create products that have a focus on low disole. And I kind of think there's might be a robin hood role model here where I can make money off people who can afford a premium product. So so I get that people say, but I want to help everyday people, and it's cool as well. But I just think that if you, you know, want to be like an our age, and you're doing the same, you know, you have created a business. You know, it's kept you in fitness. Yep. And probably the other thing that I love about creating your own business, because I love Les Mills, I you know, I'm a passionately a spokesperson, and I wanted to continue for the long term, but I don't agree with everything in the philosophy. And, and when you remember a friend of mine, I had a really good friend when I was doing triathlons. And he said to me, if you want to change the world, create a business. Now you can argue against it. But his point was, if you create a successful business, you spread your philosophy.

**Will:**

Yeah, for sure.

**Bevan**

You know, and I'm sure you feel that with what you're doing.

**Will:**

Yeah. And there's something that's really and it like, it doesn't it doesn't need to be a certain size or anything. But there's something so fulfilling about just having a goal and not a goal that sort of money oriented or success oriented, but my goal with shifters, I have worked for a lot of other fitness companies. And I wanted to give instructors something that was high quality but low cost because I knew the instructor pay was shit. And so can I create something that can facilitate instructors to create their own businesses exactly like what you just said. And so knowing that that's the thing that I'm doing propels me when it gets hard and when it was slow to take off at the start, and it took people a while to understand what shift was, I had an app before other people had apps. And I, like people didn't quite get it. But you know, I persevered because I cared about what I was doing and the outcomes that I was hoping to create.

**Bevan**

And I know you and I had conversations where you've struggled some of the ethics of other business your work. Yeah, yeah, you know, and, you know, and it's what's great when you create your own thing is it, here's the thing I believe in. And if I can get a good business around it, then I can reach bigger more of the world with it. Because it's the thing is like, we are a premium product for a running business, but because of that, I can afford to pay \$400 to someone to join my group, because I have the money to do that. And you know, and I know that once they join, my return is going to be good. So I just think that fundamentally, to start to learn some business, start to think of your experience as a business, but also to ask your value. And if you've got a good product that delivers high service, then your value, people will pay for it.

**Will:**

How much of your time do you spend on like, what's the proportion of the time you spend delivering classes versus building your business and creating community and doing that sort of stuff? Like what's the what's the mix that you spend in your business?

**Bevan**

So I've teach eight classes a week, and I probably take four running sessions a week. And then I probably spend about 10 hours a week on my business, but I've got my wife works full time onn my business with a couple staff, and we have like, 20, something coaches working for us. So

**Will:**

Wow, in you're running business?

**Bevan**

Yeah, totally. Yeah. So that's probably another thing is, you know, the argument is ultimately make more money when you have more people working for you. So if you can create a product or your market, and you can bring other people on and develop a training system, and so on, that's when you can really start to, you know, make more money. And, and to be honest, I'm lucky because my wife and I invested very young. So financially, we were in a very good position at this stage in our life. And so, our business does make money, but and we take a drawing from it. But at this point, it's more how can we use it to reach more people? So like, I'll be honest, when my wife and I talking right now, and this is big picture thinking, is how do we create like a master sheet for fitness? And then how do we create a business structure around it that can actually help more people in New Zealand move? Then it's a real big picture thing, you know, yeah. And we're going to throw a lot of money at there. And we'll take a lot of time and resource and it may not even work. But because we've got a business, it can bring some money, we can start to put some money aside to kind of think of it big picture stuff.

**Will:**

Yeah, for sure. So, so many, I feel like I could ask you things about fitness forever. But if you were a fitness instructor, who let's say you didn't quite make the wise decisions that you made sort of 20 years ago, if you were someone that was finding themselves struggling at the moment, what would be the first thing you would do to kind of zone in on what's important and what you should be doing to kind of further your career.

**Bevan**

So I think a couple things is often the older instructors drop their standards. And, and it's one thing I'm really proud of, in my career, I'm still current, like, to teach the latest team releases, I can like once every three months or do a class, I still maintain my fitness. So I've never dropped my standards or anything. Like early on in my career and you know this, I never knew the choreo, but I was cheeky enough to get away with it. You know? At my gym is known is a set of rules for Bevan and then a set of rules for others. And I got away with murder, because I've kind of hit this thing that I did really well. Well, if you watch my cast now, I'm the highest quality version of myself as an instructor. And I think it's important for a couple reasons. A) you've got to deliver, turn up, you've got to respect your customer. You know, and I think it's really important. B) for your own satisfaction, because you're turning up and just doing the same tricks you've done for the last 10 years, you're not growing anymore.

**Will:**

Yeah, that's so true. And I think that it's it's a trap that a lot of people and I think this applies to fitness instructors with applies across the board, right. Anyone that's been in a in a career for a long time, and they're, they've kind of stopped trying, undoubtedly, they've also stopped receiving joy from it, because there's an element of joy that only comes from working and attaining and achieving. And if you just you just coasting then it's just going to like it's just going to decrease and decrease over time. Yeah.

**Bevan**

And so I suppose you know, like, it was interesting on Monday night, last Monday night I wrote down I think I took one of my greatest classes of all time.

**Will:**

Really?

**Bevan**

Yeah, yeah, I was just one of those you know, just wanted everything clicked. Yeah. It was just it was it was just couldn't have done better. Now that's partly because I'm experienced instructor has done it forever. And I know the tricks and I know that did my prep for the class, you know, like, you know, I did the work to give myself the opportunity. And I think it's really important that a) know your standards, what are your standards and you might need to go back to what was important to you when you're early on in your career. B) maintain them and grow them. You know, so so this is one thing I am really proud of I am still current, I am still in touch with what the programs are right now. I still, like I've never really cared that much about fashion, but I'm still fashionable, you know, like, you know, I mean, when I started as an instructor, there was a guy at the gym who was used to be a top instructor and is still dressed like in the 80s. You know, and older instructors get into this habit, because we don't we don't spend money on clothes because you know, I do a good job.

**Will:**

This is this is all Yeah, this is this is all great stuff. Because I it's really low sort of refreshing to hear from someone who, you know, you've you've done everything, you've basically achieved everything you want to achieve in group fitness, you're still doing other stuff in fitness, but you still maintain that drive to still be the best version of you when you stand up.

**Bevan**

Yeah. And it's because the day I lose it is the day I quit.

**Will:**

Right

**Bevan**

Like it is, because if I, if I, if I'm not chasing that, then I'm regressing in life. Yeah. You know, and for me, I'm a big person who likes the evolution of self. So, you know, and the thing is, I still love the crap out of group fitness. Like, you know, again, you know, Monday night was one of the best classes I've ever done, like how cool is that. Like, I love teaching classes, and I want a long career. So that stuff, I do think you've just got to get better at body management as you get older. But also, like that, so for me, if you'd asked me 10 years ago, while while I'll have to pull back it was because my greatest strengths are people. I'm a bit of a comedian. And, you know, because I am good at fun when I teach. And I and I'm hard. Yes. If you do my workout intense, you know, yeah, you know, you're going to get kick your



ass, you know, you know, like, I remember one of the greatest compliments I got was someone said, when you walk in the room, you know, you're dealing with an athlete. And there was, that was quite a nice compliment. Yeah. So if you'd asked me 10 years ago, why do you think your career will stop? Because I wouldn't hit the hard thing anymore. You can't hit that top end.

**Will:**

You can't hit the top end in the same way that you used to?

**Bevan**

yeah. Yeah. I think if you put a video of me teaching 10 years ago to now I'm not hitting the same top end. But I still go to that place. Yeah, yeah. You know what I mean? So just those it's kind of standard things. But I've got to look after my body a bit more to be able to do that now. Yeah. And so I think as you age, I think, first of all, look at your body more. And probably one thing I think is really important, which is hard, is you can never stop. I've never had three months off. And I think that what happens is when we hit the break, we're all hardcore. We know how to push ourselves. We come back too hard, we get in this injury loop forever.

**Will:**

Yeah, you're right.

**Bevan**

So as you age, you got to be consistent. Yeah, so there's probably other things, but there's some things to think about.

**Will:**

Ah, so I think that is probably a good place for us to end. Thank you given so much for passing on some of your wisdom. Hopefully, I'll have you back soon. And we can talk about all the great things you're doing with your big picture stuff in the running scene in the film.

**Bevan**

Oh, actually, you'll hear from me soon. Because I'm writing a new book. And I'm really excited about it. But I've written a book that the whole idea is, you take someone from doing nothing to loving exercise in a year, not just achieving a fitness goal, actually loving exercise. And it takes all the lessons I've learned, and it's kind of this journey through a year. So I'll be coming up right on here. If I can just say one more thing.

**Will:**

Yeah, you can say as many things as you want.

**Bevan**

Well, just just for those listening, do you see yourself as a Pied Piper? Do you see do see the influence that you have on the world and then take responsibility with it. But then just think of how you can flourish there. Because that's what's cool. But when we go back to that thing of we have respect, once you understand that, and you see that we're Pied Pipers. What a cool opportunity there is in life. You know, and so like, you know, don't get to the end of your career, and say gosh, I missed that opportunity. It's like, to me that, you know, like, we make people's lives better. Yeah, we help people discover, you know, the greatest compliment we get, or I get is when someone says, I'm better at home,

I'm better at work. I'm just a better version of me. Because of this thing we've added. We're so lucky. So just make sure you embrace it, enhance it in your own life.

**Will:**

And it's easy to get caught up in how hard it can be, you know, keeping keeping fresh and keeping fashionable and keeping fit and dealing with low pay and running a business and all that sort of stuff. But if you can, you know, focus in on all the benefits that come around the sides from helping other people, then that's really worth it.

**Bevan**

And it's the greatest reward, isn't it? You know, for you, when someone's come and said SH1FT helped me make an income and I'm having an impact, how cool is it for you?

**Will:**

Yeah, it's fantastic. It's exactly what exactly what like I wanted, and especially as I've gotten older and more mature and the ego side of things is in the way and I focus more on other people. It's the really impactful thing that makes me happy about what I'm doing.

**Bevan**

Yeah, I love the idea of what at the end of this, what's your legacy? Hmm. You know, and I think it's an age question that comes up as you get older, you start to think about it. You know, and so it's something it could be a conscious choice.

**Will:**

Yep. But you actually have to choose it. It's not gonna happen.

**Bevan**

Yeah, exactly. Yeah.

**Will:**

Perfect. Well, thank you so much Bevan. And I look forward to chatting to you again, when you release the book.

**Will:**

So there you have my chat with Bevan. I felt like we could keep on talking forever. And we have and we will, and we do. I love his take on life. And I definitely will have him back on the podcast, because I just really love hearing what he has to say, it always makes me feel happier having heard it. There were loads of brilliant bits of advice there. But the two that stood out to me, particularly were community enjoy. Building Community is something that is talked about a lot, and often from the view of you as an instructor, building the relationship with your members. That is, of course, very important. But what's just as important is your members building relationships with one another. And I'd love to bivins tips on starting conversations. I'd actually never stopped to think about community in this way. This was a real revelation for me. But when I reflected on this, after Bevan and I chatted, I realized that we have a great example of this in our community at SH1FT. We've got the SH1FT forum, which is made up of instructors from all around the world. We originally set it up for shift instructors, but it's evolved into this amazingly supportive community, especially when COVID and virtual and lockdown all happened. They were all helping each other. It was so great to see me and the shift team monitor this all the time. But

generally, we sit back and watch as everyone supports one another. It's such a positive group. And it's so amazing to see, if you're not a member of the shift forum, then I highly recommend joining. You don't actually have to be a shift instructor to join and it's so joyful. Speaking of joy, that's the second part that stood out to me talking to Bevin: it's so easy to go into autopilot and stop trying when you've been doing something for a while. But when we do that, we're doing ourselves a disservice and one to our members because we're not being our best. I love what Bevin said about thinking of group fitness instructors as Pied Pipers, people that have a responsibility to bring others along with them and enact positive change. So to end this episode, I challenge you all to reflect on your teaching at the moment. Are you ever teaching on autopilot? Or is there anything that you've let slip? Is there anything you could do to bring more joy to your teaching, because if you master that, you'll have a very long and happy teaching career. Next week, we're getting back into the mechanics and technical detail of being an instructor in 2020 and beyond. My guest is going to be Richard Playfair of Sweat Light Films and the director and producer of SH1FT Fitness content, he's going to be giving the five top tips for virtual delivery from the Pro. 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@sh1ftfitness.com](mailto:will@sh1ftfitness.com). I'm Will Brereton and you've been listening to Group Fitness Real Talk.