

Ep #241: Representation, Diversity, and Being a Sexy Athlete with Any Body with Roz The Diva



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach, and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. And now I want to help you.

All right, runners, I have a very special human on the podcast today. I am giddy with excitement over this interview. Her name is Rosalyn Mays, aka Roz the Diva, and she is a self-described kick-ass trainer and pole diva. And I would 100% agree with that description of her. So, Roz, welcome to The Not Your Average Runner Show. Thank you for being here today.

Roz: Well, thank you for having me, Jill, it is a delight. And can I also say the irony that a meathead like me is on a show about cardio is a little scary. But like, okay, we can do this.

Jill: We can do this, we don't have to talk about running at all for the entire time. It's allowed.

Roz: We can talk about it.

Jill: I have friends that don't run.

Roz: As long as I don't have to run laps, we can talk all day every day about running.

Jill: I love it. Okay, so for my probably very few listeners who don't know who you are, can you kind of share a little bit about your backstory, how you got to where you are? Like give us the important information that we need to know about you.

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Roz: Sure. So I am holding it down in Brooklyn, New York City. And thank goodness we got some sun today because it was looking real wintry this weekend. And I have been doing fitness as my full-time career for the last eight years and I've been in the fitness industry as a professional for 11 years now.

And pole dancing is my primary sport, but I also fuck around with weights. If it's heavy and somebody can lift it, then I want to lift it. I've worked with TRX, I love dancing, I'm basically living my life. Every day is an audition to be on the Mrs. Carter World Tour Part Two. So, you know, whenever Bae is ready, I got you, boo, to be a backup dancer.

And I work primarily with plus size women, as well as a whole slew of non-traditional athletes. So we're talking people who are disabled, people who are neurodivergent, every gender and sexuality orientation and expression you can think of. And basically anybody who got picked last in gym, you're on the squad, you're on Team Diva.

It's not a career that I ever thought I would get into. I grew up playing sports, which I really liked and I had a good time. I played soccer and softball each for eight years. And they were a lot of fun, but I never ever in 100 years thought that fitness was going to be my career.

In fact, I thought I was going to be wearing some Donna Karen suits to somebody's boardroom talking about hello Roz Mays, chief diversity and inclusion officer, getting paid way too much on Wall Street. But life is what happens when you're busy making plans for it. So now I run the internet streets naked, or almost naked. And when I'm not at the gym, I'm probably dreaming of pancakes and I'm also plotting what's the next bottle that should go on my bar. So that's me.

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Jill: I love this. I just love every single thing about this. But I love that you're like, "It doesn't matter who you are, if you were picked last in gym it does not matter, you are on Team Diva." Because I think that the world needs more space like this, that like we don't judge anything, you come to us, you are on Team Diva, like you're in.

Roz: Inclusivity has always been so important to me. It's something that I saw modeled from my parents and my family. And I also feel like, you know, so I'm also young, black and, cute, and I'm female, and from a working class background. So I know what it's like on multiple fronts to not feel included and to not feel valid in some sort of identity. And so I think that's why I am hell bent on making sure that I'm not the reason why somebody else feels not included.

Jill: I love that. So what does that look like for you in how you approach teaching, how you approach your coaching? Because you're a pole instructor, you're a personal trainer, you're a group fitness instructor as well, right?

Roz: Mm-hmm.

Jill: Okay, so like what does that look like inclusivity wise? How do you make people feel included in your work?

Roz: So in my work it's about instead of expecting people to show up to the gym and mold their bodies around a movement, I try to mold the movement around the body. So I've worked with clients that have part of their fingers or part of their hands amputated. But if they want to pole, we're going to figure out how they're going to pole dance.

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I'll start with things that I know and kind of basic things, and we'll see what works and what doesn't work. And rather than blame the athlete, well, it's your fault why you can't do this because this is just the only way that this move is allowed to be done. I say, "Well, how can I clear away all the bullshit so all you have to do is Electric Slide to glory?" And we figure it out. I want to say that's probably, that's the magic sauce, is we figure it out.

Or if it's a client who, if standing to do some movements is just not accessible to them for whatever reason, we don't completely get rid of the movement. We just figure out how can we adapt it to a seated position or something with some kind of support.

And oftentimes these people, like me, who were picked last for gym, or weren't necessarily the top of everyone's first athletic choice, it's not because we weren't athletes. It's not because we weren't skilled. And it's not because we weren't deserving to be picked first. But the fitness industry is, first of all, pretty terrible. Second of all, it also presents a very singular view of how athletics should be performed. And if you don't fit into that view, something's wrong.

And so there are so many people that have such a crazy wide variety of skills, but you would never know that because there was never a time or a place for their skills to be put in the front. And just because I can't run fast, which for me, that's what I think about my childhood, is I was never a quick runner. And this was before puberty came and I gained a shit ton of weight. Running was never something I was good at.

And so when you're growing up and things, so many youth sports are based on speed. And so if you don't have speed, it looks like you're a shitty athlete. But what teenage Roz thought, what I wish teenage Roz would have known and said, "Listen, boo, you're not going to ever outrun the

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zombies. Your job is to pick them up five at a time and throw them off the bridge.”

And had I had a place where I could show and develop some skills in strength, I would have been in the fucking Olympics with all kinds of strength scholarships. And more importantly, I also would have taken myself like, oh, I actually am an athlete. I actually do have value to the athletic community. But because I did not have a place to try those skills and I didn't know that was a skill, period, then they never developed.

And at this point, I don't even remember what your original question was, I just started pontificating. So you can feel free to steer me back. Maybe this is on course because I don't know.

Jill: Actually, I love everything that you just said because first of all, I do think that a lot of the fitness industry, like probably 95% of it is bullshit, right? Because we're taught that to be a good runner you have to be fast, or to be good at strength training you have to lift the heaviest weights. And there's a very narrow definition, I think, of what is a successful athlete in all of the various disciplines.

And what I hear from you, and it's the same thing I'm trying to create in the running world, is like there are all different ways to be an athlete. And for different people, it's going to look different ways, but it doesn't make them any less of an athlete because their skills are slightly different or because they excel in this area versus another area.

What would you say, and I think this is a question that I want to start asking more and more people. But what is your definition of athlete?

Roz: Anybody with oxygen in their lungs is an athlete.

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Jill: I love this. Yes.

Roz: And if people want more specifics, do you hate warming up? You're an athlete. Do you spend too much money on leggings? You're an athlete. Do your sneakers smell like a subway? Well, New York City that's specific, but yeah, you're an athlete. Are you hungry and tired all the time? You damn sure are an athlete. So that's it.

Jill: There you go. I absolutely love that because I think there's this belief that an athlete is somebody who's like at the top of their field, or always doing all these like crazy things. And I'm like, no, an athlete is just somebody who does some sort of fitness activity. Boom. What, you went out and you went for a walk? Boom, athlete.

Roz: Exactly. I could not agree anymore with that.

Jill: Yeah. So I kind of want to kind of shift back and talk about specifically about pole, mainly because I'm obsessed with pole. And in a few weeks, my husband and I are moving to Philly and there's a pole studio very close to our new house and I plan to frequent it. I've done one pole class in my life. I fucking loved it. I absolutely loved it. And then I don't know why I never went back. But now this is happening.

But I want to understand like how did you get into pole? What has it done for you? Like why pole? Why pole dancing? And yeah, just tell me all the things about pole. Do you think I could say pole a few more times? Pole, pole, pole, pole. Okay,

Roz: First of all, in true pole dancer fashion, when he said you're moving to Philly, I immediately was like, "Well, I know what instructors I'm sending you to. And I know what studio I'm sending you to." And they have, it's

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actually Awakenings, which I forgot what neighborhood in Philly, but I was just there two weekends ago teaching. And they have a robust plus sized pole dancing program.

Jill: Stop it. Okay, yes, I will go there.

Roz: So you're going to go there. Number two, so I've been poling since October 2007. And pole for, anybody who has not tried it, is the hardest thing you will ever do with your body. And every athlete will probably tell you that, even the more slender and traditionally fit athletes. And then if you add on an extra 100 pounds to all those people, then you get Roz. And it's the hardest thing, but it was also the best time failing I had ever had at the gym.

And I was one of those people that I fell in love with the first class. And I have never been so bruised, so tired, so hungry, so sore as pole dancing has made me, and it is the greatest thing. And it is ironic that I would gravitate towards a sport that kind of requires you to be kind of naked, as naked as you feel comfortable doing.

And you would think for somebody like me, who's got a whole like novel worth of body image issues related to size and weight, then why the hell would I end up taking my clothes off and then put that on the damn internet? And I think the reason why pole hit me the way it did, is because it was less about how I looked and it was more about what my body could do.

And I'm sure there were coaches and other peeps earlier on in my life that had that same sentiment, but for whatever reason, it didn't click until pole. And so, went to pole, got my ass kicked, still get my ass kicked. And I started teaching in February 2011. And that was the beginning of the end.

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I was originally just, you know, teaching as a side hustle because it was fun. And then it's almost like a Lifetime movie, bosses find out at your regular job that you're pole dancing and they're less than thrilled about it. So I got fired from some jobs from pole dancing. And the last time I got fired from a job it wasn't just because the pole, I was fucking up. But I'm sure pole probably didn't help. That's when I said I'm just going to do this full time and do fitness full time.

But pole is great because it was my introduction to strength training. And before pole, my main focus for going to gym was losing weight. And when I started pole I was probably around like probably 215 or so. And right now I'm at 262. Anyway, when I was down to like that 215 I was like all right, I've got to lose weight. That means I have to go to the gym to do all this cardio. Because that's how I assumed people lost weight.

Jill: It's such a terrible bummer to find out that like cardio is, right? It's like, oh man.

Roz: And the thing that sucks about it is that there's so many incredible benefits to cardio. But all we talk about is weight loss and like run off the pounds. So you can't even appreciate the cardiovascular and the circulatory benefits, and the mood because you just like, "Oh, I'm the same weight I was."

But any who, so pole is not based on speed, it's using your body weight, it is lifting yourself, it's getting your ass over your head. It's looking at physics dead in the face, and saying, "No, I'm just going to do this thing instead, instead of what the physics tells me I'm supposed to be able to."

And as a plus sized person, pole dancing is even 10 times harder than it is, for people in more slender bodies. Things that might have taken my friends

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who are say, like 125, 150 pounds, it might have taken them four months to get a particular move or a trick. Well, that same thing took me two years. And what I know now, because I have enough data to look back on and recognize patterns, is that it's not that us larger pole dancers can't do the same things as smaller dancers, it just takes us way more time.

And my theory on that is we've got more weight to move, and so therefore our muscles have to develop a greater capacity for work. And that just takes time. But you don't know that. All you see mostly is you see here's me being a pile of fat and here are my friends who are like flipping circles around me, or people who started after I started and they're already ahead of me, I feel terrible.

But like I said, because now I've been poling for 14 years, I can see it wasn't that I couldn't do it, it just took me a lot longer. And I try to tell my students that every single class, like this shit is going to take a long damn time. This is not you pop in and suddenly you're good at something. This is, I'll see you in three months and you might have your foot still stuck in your ass and that's normal. And for those reasons, pole has just been really fantastic and amazing.

And I'd say the top two things that it's given me, number one, as I spoke about, it shifted the focus from how I looked to how my body, what it could do, and the cool shit that it could do. And then number two, it gave me a career that I did not know I wanted or needed.

Jill: I absolutely love that. I mean, that's how I feel about running too, is I suck at running and yet still it gave me a career that I didn't even know I wanted or needed. But I love the concept that it sounds to me like pole has taught you to be more compassionate to yourself, and more maybe even like creating a commitment knowing if I stick with this long enough, I'll be

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able to master it. Instead of the typical that we want to do, we're like, "Oh, I suck at this. Fuck it, I'm just going to give up."

It sounds to me like it has taught you, you know, like, "Oh, I just need to like keep working at it and eventually I'll be able to do whatever I want to do." Is that accurate?

Roz: Absolutely. It's also shown me that it really can be adapted for multiple types of bodies, which is another big thing. You know, I'm a plus sized pole dancer, but I'm certainly not the only one. I'm probably the loudest one and, you know, I travel the country and hopefully when the world doesn't blow up, travel the world again, particularly teaching other instructors how to work with larger pole dancers.

And it's so great and it's also, because pole is kind of equal parts, I see it as equal parts strength, dance, and flex. So you now have three opportunities to show some kind of skill somewhere. And even if you suck at most of that, usually one of those you're not terrible at when you start.

And so for some of my fellow plus dancers, we may not do the fanciest tricks, but when it is time to twerk, everyone sit the fuck down and shut the fuck up and you can't touch it. And I don't even have a butt, and that's how I feel.

And so, you know, while I'm not doing the wild shit I used to in yesteryear because I'm tired now, I can carry a beat. And I like incorporating dance and keeping the rhythm there. And that's just as important as holding yourself upside down for 30 seconds. And one can't exist without the other or else you just kind of look like a cyborg.

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And so pole is really great. And you can probably say the same thing for like gymnastics and figure skating as well, where it is a blending of multiple skills. And therefore you've got multiple chances to shine and to find ways that you actually are contributing towards the athletic glory of your squad.

Jill: I love this. As you were kind of like talking through that I had another thought that I believe that pole originated as a way for women to display their bodies for the entertainment of the men, right? For the pleasure of the men.

Roz: You know, it's funny, there's a couple different, like people are still trying to figure out the origins of pole dancing and of strip clubs. I think in the context that we're talking about it, in like modern strip club culture, 100% it was meant for the male gaze.

Jill: Yeah, but what I'm hearing is that it's been completely co-opted from that as a way to empower yourself. And like yes, it's a fitness tool, but also I feel like it's a mental fitness and confidence.

Roz: Yeah.

Jill: Because you were talking about like, oh, you know, not everybody can hang upside down on a pole. And my train of thought was, well, those poses are often just meant to dazzle the men, and like fuck them. We do pole for ourselves, so you don't need to do all of these crazy, complex poses to please somebody else. You're doing it for yourself and so you can kind of make it whatever you want because we're doing it to please ourselves and not to put on a performance for a bunch of penises.

Roz: 100%. You know, the irony though is my single ass, I'm like, please, Jesus had one single penis just roll through to a show. I'm so tired of

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dancing for these platonic vaginas, which they're awesome and I love them. But I'm also so over it. But again, that's my single self talking because I want nothing more actually. All I want is a penis with a good credit score to be like, "Good job."

Jill: But 100%, if that's what you want to use pole to do, then I still feel like it's an empowered position, right? It's like you're not being forced to, you're just like, "No, and this is just one of my many skills. Let me demonstrate."

Roz: And you nailed it. You really nailed it because one of the reasons why pole becomes so healing and powerful for women in particular, and don't get it twisted, there is every gender identity that exists on the planet of pole dancer. But it is female dominated for sure.

So what's really fascinating is, when you take the focus off of the male gaze, and for a lot of people, it's maybe the first time in their life that now you are your own gaze. And even if there is the male gaze or other gaze around you, you're not performing for their sexual pleasure. You are dancing, you're doing things that you enjoy, things that make you feel great.

And if somebody is smart enough to appreciate that, that's a bonus for them. But that's not a requirement that you are here for someone else's pleasure. In fact, the best performances and the most memorable ones are you can tell when people are having a good ass time on stage. And that's what this is about.

It's about having fun. And when you're having fun, you naturally exude confidence. And it's not because you're chasing that confidence, it's just what happens when you're enjoying yourself. And that's where the sex appeal comes in.

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So you absolutely will have people, whether it's a single penis with a good credit score or platonic vaginas, they will look at you and be like, "Damn, that shit is sexy as hell." But it's the most respectful objectifying possible. And you're not just looking at how hot are you, but now it's like, that was sexy because I saw how you kept your lat muscles engaged when you pulled up on the pole. And I saw how you hit those beats of the song.

And also, I describe it as when you're hanging out in a restaurant or a bar, and you see the people at the table next to you. And they're laughing at somebody's joking, and they're having a good time. And you don't know what the joke is, but you want to know because you want to laugh like that.

So that's similar to how I encourage people to approach pole dancing, is I want people to look at you dancing and say, "Oh my gosh, I want to know the inside scoop because you're having fun, I want to have fun with you."

And with pole dancing, we've got an advantage because it is a visual sport. You know, it's not like if you went, if you were on the StairMaster, which I'm sorry if you're ever on the StairMaster. When you move up to the next level, you just hike up more stairs. There's not a huge visual change of what your body does. As opposed to pole, when you get stronger now you went from walking upright and now, oh, you're in a handstand. Oh, now you are hanging off the pole with one leg.

So we got the cool factor in our favor, I can't lie about that one. Which also it helps so much and it helps get the, you know, the likes and the Instagram engagement. But it also gives you something tangible to work towards. So instead of just saying, "Man, I really hope I can master some more stairs." You know, which shout out to people who like to StairMaster, I don't know what the fuck is wrong with you, but I guess you exist.

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Jill: And the elliptical, also those people. It's just a no.

Roz: Yeah, that's a no for me, dog. But yeah, but because there's these visual markers, that's what I think also helps people, especially the underdogs, that's what helps us kind of keep going, is we see potentially what we could look like.

Jill: Yeah, I love that. It's an example of what's possible.

Roz: Yes, exactly.

Jill: So you used a term a few moments ago that I kind of want to circle back to and that was respectful objectifying. Say more to me about what that means to you. Because I love that, I absolutely love that.

Roz: So I would define respectful objectifying as when you kind of voluntarily put your sexual expression on display, even if it's not sexual, but I'm talking about the sexual kind. There's a difference when you're doing it because you feel obligated to do that. And there's a difference when you are excited and proud to do that. When you are in control of that and when you're able to make decisions about how your sexuality is expressed, then that is a fucking powerful thing.

Then you go from being everyone else's puppet, to now they're cast under your spell. And this is the part where sex is fun, is because when it's your choice, when it's consensual both ways, then like bring that shit on. Because let's keep it real, it's a damn fantasy for a room full of people to be like, "Damn, I kind of want to do you."

And that's not everybody's fantasy, I want to make that clear. So if that's not what you're seeking, that doesn't make you any less valid about pole

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dancer. That is 100% what I'm seeking and what my exhibitionist ass is also seeking. So it's a safe place because, you know, everything from the, I know the facility, I know the people around me, so there's that kind of like practical safety.

And then there's also the psychological safety that the people around you, you know they're in your corner. Like I've never been to a performance where somebody does something on stage and the crowd is like, "You know what? Fuck that, it wasn't cute, I don't like that. Next person." Because that person would probably get cast into the dark pits of hell by everybody else in the crowd who's like, "Shut the fuck up and let them groove."

And I think what this also proves, which America in particular, does not like to acknowledge is that people get horny for all kinds of other people. We have this assumption that what is considered beautiful and sexy to people on the outside is one thing. It's the, you know, it's the slender, tall, like 22 year old models. And we assume that that's what everyone goes after.

But if you take a glance into real ass people, and if you take a glance into people's, what they've bookmarked from Pornhub, odds are it is every single body that exists on the planet. And my experience with pole is we don't have to just pretend when we're in the safety of our homes by ourselves, "You know what? I like girls with big thighs, but I don't want to tell people because what if they don't like that? I'm not supposed to like that."

Well, most pole studios and most pole shows blow that out of the water because you will have older dancers, like 60 and up, you will have younger dancers, you will have people, as I mentioned, everybody who is attracted

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to all kinds of genitalia, all kinds of sizes. And that's the respectable part of the objectification.

And, you know, the objectification thing, so this actually does go back to my childhood and specifically when I was discovering that boys existed. And because, unfortunately, I'm attracted to them.

Jill: If only it really was a choice, right?

Roz: Like God, anybody else? Is there no one else? Anyway, so I recall being in like middle school or so, even before, like elementary school, and second grade specifically. And I remember, you know, it's when like kids start to learn like what little boys had crushes on little girls and vice versa. And I was one of the only black kids in my class at that time. And nobody ever had a crush on me. I never heard that rumor, I heard about all the girls but not me.

And when I was really young, like I said, that second grade age, I thought it was because well that's because white boys like white girls, and black boys like black girls, because I didn't understand how race worked. And then once I got to middle school and high school and I understood, okay, this is not a race based thing always, it's also about size.

And so from the age of about 12 or 13 I decided that because I was overweight, that was the reason why I didn't have much value to boys. Which is a whole season of Oprah, Lord Jesus. So then here comes pole and I have to kind of be naked and show everyone the exact reasons why I have deemed myself not valuable to men. And so I've been labeled like a smart girl, I'm the nice girl, I'm the overachiever. But I was never the hot girl.

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And I'm not saying this is a healthy thing at all, but that's the one title I've been chasing. Because people have acknowledged my intellect, they've acknowledged I'm a good person, I'm smart. And I'm like, "Cool story. I want to be the hot one now." And so pole has given me a chance, even if it's just for the three minutes on stage, to be the hot one.

Jill: Love, love, love that. I love that. Just on that topic, I want to like segue into something else in a moment. But for anybody who wants to see just how fucking sexy Roz is on the pole, go check out this video called Dangerous Curves, that she's basically the star of. Yes, and there is just some like absolutely stunning video of you in that. And we're going to have a link to that in the show notes.

But I think you can also Google Dangerous Curves, I want to say New York Times. It was in the New York Times. You should be able to Google that and find it on YouTube. But it is absolutely spectacular. So make sure you check that out.

Roz: Thank you so much.

Jill: I was watching, I was kind of like woo, I was getting a little warm watching it today. But I want to kind of touch on what it's like for you to be a plus size fitness instructor. To be a plus size fitness instructor in the current fitness world that we live in, which is not super friendly to plus size folks.

Roz: So this is where things get interesting. And it's similar to what I was just speaking about, what people say in public versus what they do in private. So in the public face of fitness everything is about weight loss. It's about you. It's about for dudes, how chiseled can you look? For women, it's how small can you get? And if you're outside of those things, or you go to

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the gym for some other reason other than weight loss, then that almost doesn't exist. That's the public persona.

But in private people are dying for representation. And they are thirsty and they are craving diverse representation in sports. And the representation in leadership, there are not enough words to talk about how important this is. Because I have so many clients, particularly clients in, my private clients, but really all of them who see me no matter what I'm doing.

They say, "I specifically came here, because of how you look. Because I knew if I came to your class I wouldn't have to apologize or explain my weight or why I hate jumping jacks because my boobs are too big, and they're heavy. Or why I can't do something." Or even if it's, "Listen, I see you trying and you can do it. So now I'll actually try. I didn't know that that was something in the realm of possibilities for people who looked like us."

And I've also encountered, besides people who just identify with my size, what I also feel is that game recognize game in the sense that other minorities and other marginalized athletes, they're also like, "Well, if you're accepting of these one peeps, maybe you'll accept us too."

And this is where I've gotten, I've been so fortunate to coach so many people who aren't heterosexual and who aren't cisgender. Meaning that they do not identify as the gender that they present as or that they were assigned at birth. I just learned cisgender like two years ago, what that meant, so I try to also spread the wealth with that.

Jill: No, I appreciate that definition because I don't think everybody knows. Right, let's spread the word.

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Roz: Yeah, so I've worked with so many clients who are not cisgender and who aren't straight. And I asked one of them one day, I'm like, "I'm honored to be your guru, but how the hell did you pick me?" And they're like, "Well, one thing, you treated one of us well and that got word out in our friend group. But then also, it's like, well, if you're accepting of all these other misfits, then maybe you'll fuck around with us."

And that's really how I've gotten to work with, you know, also athletes with disabilities. And those adaptive athletes, and I don't know if para athletes is a word, but basically, anybody who, again, has that nontraditional body. Let's work it out.

And you would assume that there is no market for someone who looks like me or who look like my clients because we are considered the before. We are the type of body that you're taught to run away from. And we're the type of body that you're taught this is a starting point. This is not something that you should aspire towards. This is what you want to move from.

And for some people, a lot of people, it blows their mind that somebody might actually aspire to look like me. Or somebody might aspire to move like me because it is assumed that because of my size, I have a low level of fitness and that I'm not capable of doing cool shit in the gym.

And I assumed that for a long time, too. I would not think plus sized instructing, that sounds like an oxymoron. And it sounds like that's this until you get some of the DMs that I get, and you get the messages, and the emails, and the in-person talks of people who are like I started because of you. Because I saw somebody finally, finally, I saw somebody who kind of looks like me, even if not exactly looking like it. And I thought oh, there's hope.

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Or they just legit didn't know they were allowed to even try and people need some sort of personal invitation. So even though I have not spoken to everybody personally, of course, even just having that visual representation is a way of speaking to people and inviting them in, saying there's space for me, so that means there's space for you. And it's very, very difficult to convince people that there is space for you, if you don't look like them. It's not impossible, but it is a whole stack of work. It's a new kind of work.

You know, it's similar to if I were to go into a fitness facility or any job and I'm the only black girl there, it doesn't mean that I can't do that job or that they won't accept me. But they've got to prove, like you say you love diversity, but where is it?

You know, gyms love talking about how body positive they are and how everyone is able to do this. But then if you have equipment where the weight limit ends at 250, what are you talking about? That's not inclusive. If you're selling T-shirts with your gym's logo, but your shirts stop at a size large, bro, hate to bring it to you, you're not inclusive. If you don't have any single stall bathrooms that are good for all genders, you're not nearly as inclusive as you think you are.

And that's what I encounter basically every day. I'm not talking about like every day I wake up and I got to fight somebody. It's not that, but it's these - All my life I had to fight. We just, by the way, we've reached peak blackness because I just quoted *The Color Purple*.

Jill: I love it. Bring it on.

Roz: That is like, for anybody who's not familiar, in Black culture when you quote *The Color Purple*, you mean some shit. Anyway, moving on.

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Jill: I just got chills, that is so good.

Roz: But it's the things that you notice. You notice these small, accidental micro aggressions. And I do believe that most of these aggressions are, they're not done on purpose to purposely exclude people who look like me. But the problem is when you point it out to people and say, "Hey, can we change this so everybody can roll through?"

And then when people like, "Well, expensive, takes time, we don't have clients that size." That's where, all right, now you need to catch these hands because you don't know what you don't know. But if you don't make an effort after that, when someone lets you know you're fucking up a little bit, that's where the problems are. And that's where also a good chunk of the industry is in.

And most people who are like us, you know, we're not going to be Olympics tomorrow, but we're working out, part of it so we don't have a heart attack and die at 40. There's certainly health reasons, it's also just awesome. But the majority of people, especially American women, you know, they're closer to our size than they are to every fitness model size.

Jill: Yeah.

Roz: And that's the actual whole ass truth. And it's like when are we going to acknowledge the data that is in front of us? And when are we going to make room for everyone?

Jill: Yeah.

Roz: And I'm doing everything that I can to try to make room for everybody. I'm so fortunate also in that I really only fuck with my other, like other gym

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friends that I know and other plus sized athletes. So I have low key insulated myself, for the most part, of only hanging out with people who move similarly to I do, or even that they move similarly, but they're cool peeps and I know that. I felt respected by them and so that's why I'm rocking with them for whatever reason.

So it's kind of funny because now if I went into like a regular gym and stuff was just like very stereotypical and everybody looks like you're The Rock. Although if everybody looked like The Rock with at the gym, I would just throw the vagina straight at them.

Jill: I was going to say, why is that a problem?

Roz: That is the best problem I would love to solve. So I'd probably be like, "Oh God, what's wrong with all of you?" Because now, like I said, at this point inclusivity has been such a part of my fitness career and also just me and my friends, that my standards are pretty high, and they should be high. And it's influenced the kind of workshops that I teach. It's influenced what I put on Instagram and like social media.

So I'm thankful for it. But it's a wild ride when you take a step back and look at, again, the public persona of fitness and then who actually participates.

Jill: Yeah. Yeah, I could not agree more. And I just think like, for fitness instructors, first of all, we need more plus size fitness instructors. And if you are listening to this show and you're thinking, "Well, I'd love to be a coach, or a trainer, or something like that. But I am concerned that I'm too fat," or whatever bullshit story you have about your body that you think disqualifies you from it. No, please, we need more.

Roz: Please.

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Jill We need like all of the plus sized people who have that desire, to follow that desire. Because the world doesn't change just from wishing about it. We have to take the action and we have to actually create the visuals so that we keep moving things forward.

And so I'm grateful, like I'm so grateful to you that you're doing this work. And the fact that you share the ups and downs, you share all the things right? You're not like, "Oh, I'm a plus size athlete and everything's perfect for me." You share all of the struggles that we all feel so. So thank you for that.

Roz: You're so welcome. And honestly, this is a team effort because there is no way that I would have survived by now if not for more support than I know what to do it. I mean, there are times you're drowning in other people's gratitude. And I am so fortunate, you know, especially these last two years of lockdown. New York City was, we locked the whole hell down. You know, we've been open for a while now, but still.

So you think as a personal trainer, somebody whose job is to physically move people, and then have everything shut down overnight, what the hell are you going to do? And then to have such a niche kind of client like I have. Which it's not nice, it's just treated that way. You would think I would not have a career and it certainly would have died over the global emergency.

But because of people like you, Jill, and the people listening, not only did I come out of lockdown alive, but my career is in a really, really solid place right now. So truly, I would be absolutely nothing without all of those athletes, plus size and otherwise, who took a chance and who came to my class. They came to classes virtually, in person, in parking lots, outside, like all these different places.

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People, really Team Diva made me what I am. And especially, there were so many times I was like, “What the hell am I doing?” When I’m super broke, I’m talking about like paying rent on credit cards, crying in the shower kind of depressed, broke. And at those times, it was not me who kept myself going. It was all of you all out there. And I was like, “Well, I guess I’ll keep going because they see something, I don’t know. But all right, I guess I’ll do some shit.”

And so I always want to make sure that first and foremost, people understand how lucky I am to have this kind of support. And also shout out to mom, dad, my sister Lindsey and Grammy.

Jill: I love that. So how can people find you? Give us all the places that people can find you, ways that they can work with you. Because I have a feeling you’re going to have some new friends after this.

Roz: I hope so. So you can hit me up on Instagram. I’m Roz, R-O-Z, the Diva. And I am venturing into TikTok as well. Twitter’s not that exciting, but it’s there. I also want to give a shout out to Jacqueline who is my new marketing superhero who is getting my whole internet life together as we speak. So you can hit up rozthediva.com, we’ve got some awesome website changes and upgrades that are popping up.

So I’ve got a couple different ways that people can rock with me and get some Team Diva in their life. There is a virtual subscription box, aka Patreon and there every Tuesday evening we have a core and stretch class live over Zoom. It’s fantastic for people who are just starting out fitness or they just need some sort of accountability to do a couple crunches and then to stretch something.

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So we've got Patreon, we've also got personal training, both in person and virtual. And then I've also got my group pole dancing classes that are held in person in Brooklyn at IncrediPole. And then last but not least, you can always be my free ass friend on Instagram. Because I'm always dropping random bombs either about what I'm doing in the gym, trying to give some tips, trying to show how I can keep my spine as neutral as possible when I'm lifting. And then of course, there's always the rants about people who make me angry every so often.

But any way you want to get involved in Team Diva, just let me know. Also, if anybody has a Fitbit out there, definitely sign up for Fitbit premium because I've got a couple of videos that I've led there. And for this year, 2022, I'm one of their future trainers, which is kind of dope. I know, why did I wait 45 minutes to say that?

Jill: Way to bury the lead, Roz.

Roz: Yeah, so I try to make myself as stalkable as possible. So you know what to do from here.

Jill: All right, I absolutely love this. Thank you so much. First of all, I'm going to be showing up at one of those pole classes as soon as we get moved into Philly. And it's like a quick train ride right up the state, so I will be showing up at one of those classes. But everybody please, we'll have all of Roz's links in the show notes. Please check her out. She is an amazing human. She's a fabulous example of how to human as a matter of fact.

So thank you for being here today. And yeah, I can't wait to pole with you. It's going to be fun.

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Roz: Yeah. And, Jill, thank you for having me, thank you for all of the work that you've done. And I don't even have to poll your squad because I know you have served as an amazing source of representation and knowledge for them. So thank you for being in the struggle with me on the front lines.

Jill: It's all good, we're all in it together. All right, and we are out.

Hey, real quick before you go, I have a huge announcement about the Rebel Runner Roadmap. We are changing the name to Up And Running to better reflect the result you'll get when you take the class. Up And Running is a 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be.

The next class opens on March 30th so head on over to notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrunning to get your name on the wait list. I would love to be a part of your journey.