



# 8 CAREER ADVANCEMENT IDEAS

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for Physical Therapist Assistants

# A Letter From Kim Nartker

I am saddened to see how our career field has left us **unfulfilled**, **frustrated** and completely **burned out** as Therapists. I recall before I decided on my career path as a PTA I knew I wanted to work in healthcare, but did not want to work with blood. I felt the draw to help others live a better life, but really had no clear path or direction at that time. I married early and started my family so that my husband at that time could complete his education. When he graduated I was a little older and at a place with our children to look into me going to school. I was already in my late 20's when I discovered the **PTA career path**.

I did all of my pre req requirements and applied for the program at Kapi'o'Olani Community college. Yes, I completed my course work in Oahu Hawaii. There were over 250 applicants for the PTA program and the school would only accept 25. The Hawaii program allowed ½ of those chosen to be Hawaii residents so that left 12-13 spots to non residents. I was accepted into the program and was chosen to be the class president.

I graduated in 1999 and immediately moved to Utah with my family to begin my career. I was elated. I ate, slept and dreamed about everything physical therapy. It was truly **my passion**. The first set of medicare changes began in 1999 but i really did not feel them. I embarked on a career in outpatient and I seeked to learn everything I could about PT and how I could help my clients.

Just like many of you, I moved and although I wanted to work in outpatient care, my family finances caused me to work in skilled nursing for 5 years, then on to home health when I needed more financial independence.

I don't ever recall not **LOVING** what I did, but do recall wanting to **provide more** for my clients. I was dreaming of **helping people** outside my PTA license and I could see a lot of gaps that offered me opportunities, but I also knew there was a fine line between making more money and helping others and losing my license as a PTA which fed me and my family.

Times are way different now. I am very thankful that I chose to open a PT clinic. This decision **propelled** me to where I am today. I now have the opportunity to help other PTA's step up and advance their careers much earlier in their career than I was able to.

My **goal** with this **opportunity** is to provide a PTA with all they need to make the **right choice** that works for where they are in their personal life.

This **free downloadable Career Advancement Ideas for PTA's** is the start for me to give back to PTA's in an effort to help offer paths that help PTA's advance clinically and financially.

I hope this information is helpful for you!



Kim



# PTA CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES PRO'S AND CON'S

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I hope this helps you  
gain financial  
independence and  
clinical freedom

*Cheers to your future!*

# 01. Personal Training Certification

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## PROS

- 2199.99 NASM (Cert. Personal Training, Stretch and Flex specialist and Biz Bundle)
- Recognized and respected certification in the fitness industry
- Can increase earning potential as a personal trainer and work as a Personal Trainer as a side hustle
- Offers various study options, including self-paced and guided programs

### More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Work hours are typically 5am-10am then again 3pm-8pm
- Yearly salary FT not typical until you build your training load, typically group, but 1:1 Avail but paid less
- Course requirements vary biannually typically unchallenging basic materials
- Cost of Study 2K for bundle NASM
- Typical salary 25K-50K can be more if you are able to keep a full caseload

## CONS

- Cost of certification may not include all study materials
- Requires a high school diploma or equivalent and CPR/AED certification
- Curriculum covering anatomy, exercise science, and program design are basic and not challenging for rehab educated professionals
- Time commitment for studying and preparing for the exam can be substantial
- Certification does not allow you to utilize hands on training you can provide as a PTA
- You are not legally covered when using your hands on experience as it is not covered by your Personal Trainer Professional Insurance
- You can lose your PTA license if you promote you are a PTA
- Limits you to performing services as a personal trainer to be covered legally
- Any one is eligible to study to work as a Personal Trainer so your skills as a PTA aren't necessarily recognized through promotion

## 02. Pilates Certification

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### PROS

- When it comes to a good, reputable [Pilates teacher training program](#) you can expect to pay in the ballpark of \$6,000 for the group in-studio courses, required materials (manuals/books/videos), and test-out fees. If you choose to take any of the required courses privately, which people do for scheduling reasons, that will be an additional cost
- Pilates is a popular form of exercise with a growing demand for certified instructors
  - You'll need to take into consideration how you'll be completing your 400+ out-of-class required hours because you'll need access to Pilates equipment for the majority of those hours. Some people choose to [buy equipment](#), especially if they are planning on opening up their own studio eventually, but due to financial or space constraints that's not an option for everyone
  - Opportunities to work in fitness centers, studios, or even as a private instructor.
  - A rewarding career helping clients improve core strength, flexibility, and overall fitness

### CONS

- Certification programs' cost can vary, and some comprehensive ones can be expensive starting around 6K
- Eligibility requirements may include prior fitness training experience or a related certification.
- Time commitment for training and practice to become proficient as an instructor takes 4 weeks - 6 mos
- You are not legally covered when using your hands on experience from your PTA training as it is not covered by your Pilates Professional Insurance
- You can lose your PTA license if you promote yourself as a PTA.
- Limits you to performing services as a pilates instructor to be covered legally
- Any one is eligible to study to work as a Pilates Instructor so your skills as a PTA aren't necessarily recognized through promotion nor can you use them as a pilates instructor

#### More information on specifics with this career choice:

- 10 weeks for initial start up training
- Cost of Study from initial to now
- You can expect to make about \$25 per class in a gym and about \$40-\$50 per private lesson in a Pilates studio this rate can increase if you choose to specialize in niche offerings
- Your income can increase when choosing to open your own studio



## 03. Yoga Certification

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### PROS

- Yoga Works Certification was voted Best in 2023 for yoga training the cost is \$2700 and up with and all-inclusive package starting at \$4775.00
- Yoga is a widely practiced and popular form of exercise and relaxation
- Many different types of yoga certifications available to suit various interests
- Opportunities to work in studios, fitness centers, retreats, or as a private instructor

#### More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Training Time 4 weeks - 6 months
- Pays around \$25.00/class and can increase for niche classes

### CONS

- The cost of certification can range from affordable to quite expensive, depending on the program and requires many courses to be an elite teacher
- Eligibility requirements may include prior yoga experience or a certain number of practice hours typical is 200- 300 hour programs to begin teaching basic yoga classes
- Time commitment for training and practice to become a competent yoga instructor Beginning YogaWorks takes 6 weeks to complete: weekends take 3-6 months to complete and all inclusive takes about 4 weeks to complete
- You are not legally covered when using your hands on experience as it is not covered by your Yoga Instructor Professional Insurance
- You can lose your PTA license if you promote yourself as a PTA.
- Limits you to performing services as a yoga instructor to be covered legally
- Any one is eligible to study to work as a Yoga Instructor so your skills as a PTA aren't necessarily recognized through promotion of yoga

# 04. Health Coach Certification

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## PROS

- Increasing demand for health coaches as people focus on preventive healthcare
- Opportunities to work in corporate wellness programs, health clinics, or as an independent coach.
- Can make a positive impact on clients' lives by guiding them towards healthier lifestyles

### More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Typical work hours for solo health coaches range from 8am-9pm and are based on client need
- Yearly salary is not a guarantee with solo practice owners. You will need to learn marketing and sales to grow your clientele. Most coaches take years to fill their caseload
- 6 months to a year and ongoing to learn consumer behavior and best practices in treatment
- Can take years to get to a salary above 35K consistently or until you are trained in marketing and sales
- If you work for a company you can earn 60-75K

## CONS

- Certification programs can be moderately priced to expensive ranging from 1000.00 from ACE and 5K+ for your more reputable courses
- Most programs lack teaching you how to sell your new service leaving most new health coaches without clients
- Eligibility requirements may vary, but some programs require a background in health or wellness
- Time commitment for completing the training and gaining practical experience.
- This is a sedentary position with decreased movement, you will need to ensure you perform self care and strength training to stay healthy yourself
- You are not legally covered when using your hands on experience as it is not covered by your Health Coach Professional Insurance
- You can lose your PTA license if you promote yourself as a PTA
- Limits you to performing services as a personal health coach to be covered legally
- Any one is eligible to study to work as a health coach so your skills as a PTA aren't necessarily recognized through promotion of health coach services

# 05. Thai Yoga Massage Certification

## PROS

- Thai yoga massage is a unique and ancient healing practice with a niche market
- Can offer services in spas, wellness centers, or as a private practitioner
- Can provide a deeply rewarding experience for both the therapist and the client
- Can earn 150-250 for 1.5-2.5 hour treatment sessions

### More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Work hours are based on your caseload
- Yearly salary can earn up to 75K if you see 10 people every week for 1.5 hours a treatment
- Takes Years invested in Study before you can gain ROI
- Cost of Study from initial to now 1K-10K and up

## CONS

- Certification programs may be limited in some regions, requiring travel to find suitable training. Training usually requires weeks away from home
- Costs can vary depending on the program and the duration of the training
- Time commitment for training and mastering the techniques can be significant
- You will need to build a caseload and learn to market and sell your services
- It will take time to build up to a salary equivalent to a rehab professional salary, but once you do you can earn 150 for a 1.5 hour session. Most thai yoga professionals only see 1-2 clients/day due to how involved the treatments are
- You are not legally covered when using your PTA hands on experience as it is not covered by your Thai Yoga Professional Insurance
- Treatment times 1-2.5 hour treatment sessions using your entire body to assist in treatment. Requires you to work on the floor
- Limits you to performing services as a thai yoga practitioner to be covered legally
- Any one is eligible to study to work as a Thai Yoga Practitioner so your skills as a PTA aren't necessarily recognized through promotion with these services



## 06. Massage Therapy School and License

### PROS

- Licensed massage therapists are in demand in various settings, including spas, clinics, and sports facilities.
- Can offer a flexible career with opportunities to work independently or as part of a team.
- Potential to build a loyal client base and develop specialized techniques.
- Typically only work 20-30 hours per week

#### More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Work hours typically 9 am-9 pm availability
- Yearly salary 40K more if you open your own massage clinic
- Years vested in Study 1+
- Cost of Study 10K

### CONS

- The process of obtaining a massage therapy license can vary by state, and requirements may be extensive.
- Cost of education and licensing fees can add up to greater than 10K
- Requires a significant time commitment for completing the required education and training hours typically 1 year basic education
- You are not legally covered when providing exercise for Massage clients so you will need to combine this license with a personal training license to be covered professionally providing massage in combination with ex
- You can lose your PTA license if you promote yourself as a PTA
- Limits you to performing services as a massage therapist to be covered legally
- Any one is eligible to study to go to school to become a LMT so your skills as a PTA aren't necessarily recognized through promotion of massage
- Most massage therapists do not work over 25-30 hours a week and this profession is very hard on hands and arms so you will want to make sure you are taking care of yourself through selfcare. (Income potential can increase if you open your own massage business)
- Solo LMTs need to pay to learn marketing and sales
- Working as a LMT salary typically is around low PTA salary

# 07. Physical Therapy School

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## PROS

- Becoming a licensed physical therapist can lead to a rewarding and stable career
- High demand for physical therapists in various healthcare settings
- Opportunities to specialize in different areas of physical therapy.
- Ability to open a PT solo practice owner and grow and expand with multiple therapists
- Can open cash PT or In network PT clinic

More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Typical hours same as PTA
- Yearly salary 60K+
- Years vested in Study 2-4
- Cost of Study 150K+

## CONS

- Physical therapy programs are typically lengthy and can be expensive typically costing 150K+
- Requires a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite and completion of a doctoral degree in physical therapy.
- Competitive admission process, with limited seats available in physical therapy schools.
- You will be in the same position as you are now if you want to work for a company. Your salary will cap at around 70K for ortho but you can make much more in home health if that is the area you want to work.
- ROI Annual Home Health Salary 90K vs student loans upwards of 150K may not be worth the time and money investment for many years

# 08. Certified Stretch Mobility Coach

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## PROS

- Becoming a Certified Stretch Mobility Coach can lead to a rewarding and successful career
- A PTA turned SMC can use their skill, education and experience under their Apprentice and SMC title
- Training time as little as 2 weeks to become paid apprentice
- Learn The Stretch Method and practice while seeing clients and earning a higher salary than typical PTA
- There is a growing high demand for Non PT specialized care for musculoskeletal conditions and medically complex patients
- There are opportunities to specialize in niche services
- There are business ownership opportunities
- Training time to up and treating new clients average of 2 weeks
- Earning potential in Stretch Mobility coach Orthopedic services are greater than current PTA earning potential
- You work alongside specialists, PT's, Chiropractic and MD's instead of assisting PT's
- You are able to help people longer, while providing a skill not offered in traditional PT care
- You have more advancement opportunities
- Only PTA's can train, so this field does not allow unskilled professionals to learn their intellectual property
- Advanced Learning for continuing education that focuses on growing you as a Stretch Mobility Coach, these courses are not open to the general therapy public
- Autonomy to work solo without the supervision of a PT or grow and expand if choosing to open a Stretch Mobility Coach Clinic.
- You will not risk your PTA License offering Stretch Mobility Coach Services
- You gain the Title of Apprentice Stretch Mobility Coach until you pass your practicum then gain use of Stretch Mobility Coach title
- Legally covered by your PTA professional liability insurance
- Do not have to maintain PTA license to work as a SMC
- Affiliate owners are provided a website, social media pages, and business, sales and marketing training that is proven and guaranteed to help them get to 10K their first month in biz when they follow the proven method
- Affiliate owners and SMC's are connected across the US with other SMCs and owners providing a close community of support and mentoring

## 08. Certified Stretch Mobility Coach

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### CONS

- Certifications can be moderately priced from 6K and may be more for aspiring PTA Business owners that choose affiliation
- Onboarding and initial online training will take a couple of after work days to get you acquainted with the new material and begin learning foundational skills to prepare you for the 3 day intensive training
- Travel Cost to attend the 3 day intensive Skills Mastery Training Camp
- Time away from home and work to attend the 3 day intensive Skills Mastery Training Camp
- \$5000.00 Annual License Fee for Stretch Mobility Coach business ownership (Biz Website and Sales and marketing training included in this fee)

More information on specifics with this career choice:

- Work hours typically 8 am- 6pm
- Yearly salary starts at 50-75K for SMC, business owner revenue and lead coach revenue can get to over 6 figures
- Learn as you work model
- Cost of Study 6k initial with more advanced training opportunities that are paid after certification



It's essential to carefully research each certification or program to understand the specific costs, eligibility requirements, time commitments, and potential career opportunities associated with them. Your interests, goals, and resources will play a significant role in choosing the right path for your career in the health and fitness industry.

There are cheaper opportunities available to PTA's, but most will not provide you enough skill to maintain a long term caseload that allows you to step away from your PTA position in order to earn the same money you can earn as a PTA.

Be prepared to research marketing and sales programs to learn to build a caseload with these opportunities. The cost of business training can be hefty for all professions except Stretch Mobility Coaching.

## *Congratulations!*

I hope that you find this information helpful for you as you start the learning process to step towards the career of your dreams.

If you do this right, you will start feeling better about your choices. If you have any other questions or want more information, please reach out in my private Facebook group PTA Trailblazers. Please help me help other PTA's by sharing this information out to other PTA's.

Make sure you keep an eye on your email inbox for more free training and stay informed with what me and other trailblazer PTA's are doing. Join me for my FB live every Thursday at 12pm EST inside my PTA Trailblazer Facebook group.

[JOIN MY PRIVATE GROUP](#)

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*Kim Nartker*

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