

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this letter to recommend Jim Donak as an educator and mentor. I had the great fortune of learning from him during my year training at San Francisco's Circus Center in 2003-2004. In brief, both the skills and methods that I learned from Jim prepared me for intensive training and performance in circus arts, as well as setting a high bar for my work as an educator and coach.

Jim led courses in flexibility and trampoline technique – these were the names on the schedule. Taking courses with Jim was much more than simple technique, however. Within each course, the physical technique was supported by comprehensive descriptions of the theoretical and anatomical strategies behind the skills. In Jim's courses, each student's trajectory is individual; therefore Jim supplies (if you will) a map of the landscape to be covered while situating each student within it. For instance, an individual goal, physical limitation, or learning style will influence how Jim emphasizes specific information for different students. Although I worked with Jim only a short time, his instruction has been instrumental to all facets of my work. I continually return to concepts I learned in his courses. As a trainer for aerial coaches with Montreal's National Circus School, I continue to use strategies I learned with Jim. These include:

- Encouraging students to work with partners, to become familiar with respectful contact and respecting how different bodies experience strength and flexibility;
- Creating exercises tailored to specific students so that they can become more familiar with their physical experience, and use that knowledge to both prevent and heal from injuries and harmful neuromotor pathways in the future;
- Never underestimating students by providing generous access to anatomical, neuromuscular, and theoretical information that might provide a student with perspective on their body or experience;
- The commitment to each student and their pathway, which is demonstrated by going above and beyond to provide energy and resources to each student that asks.

Finally, in the two years that I programmed the American Circus Educators biennial conference, I ensured that Jim had ample opportunities to present workshops so that his knowledge can be shared widely, and so that his approach can serve as an example to other educators.

Based on my experiences learning from Jim Donak, I highly recommend him as an educator, be that as a coach, workshop leader, teacher-educator, or other position.

I would be happy to further discuss this letter, and can be contacted through email at:

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Sincerely,



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