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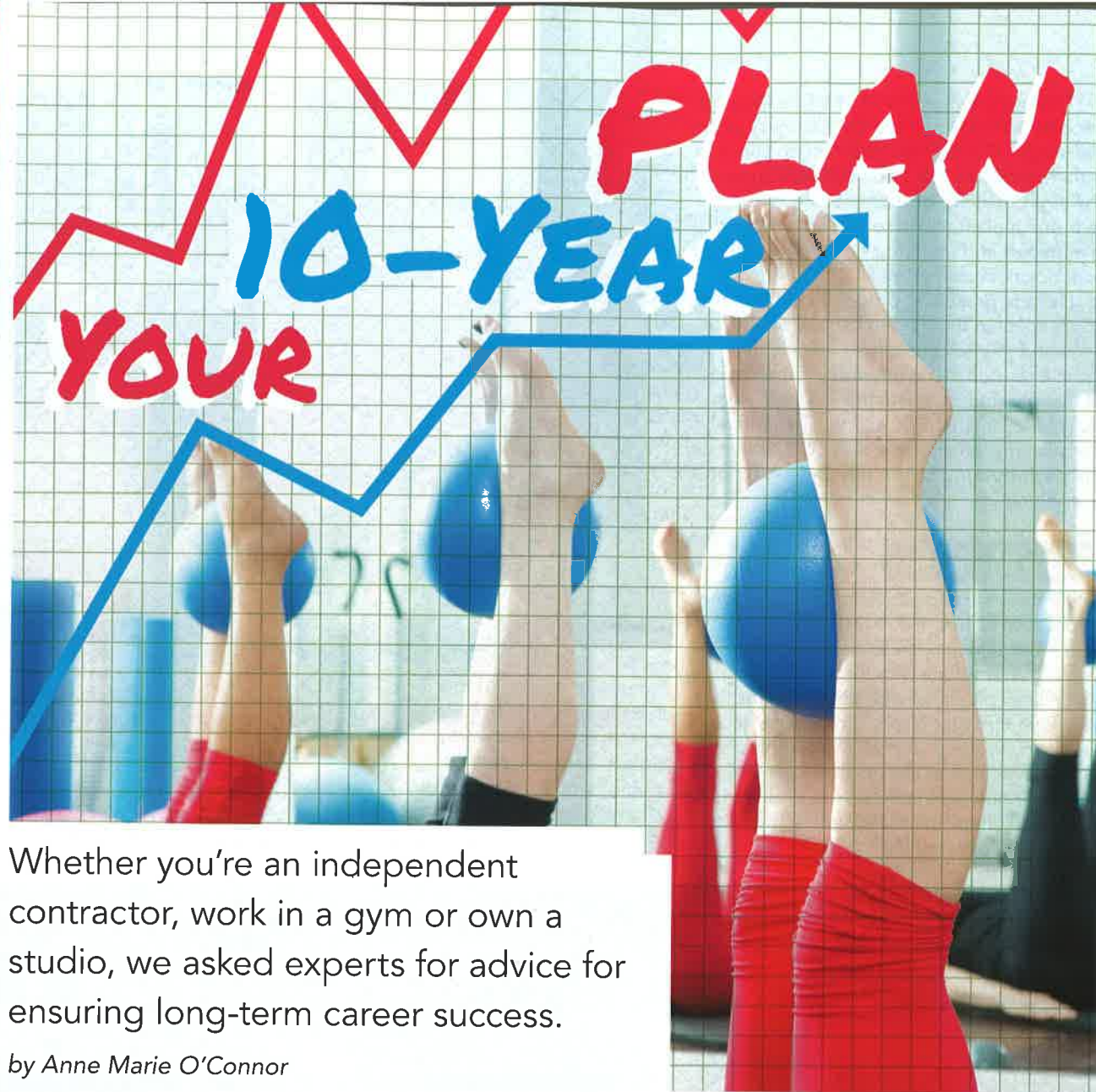
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Whether you're an independent contractor, work in a gym or own a studio, we asked experts for advice for ensuring long-term career success.

by Anne Marie O'Connor

Your students constantly rave about how much better they feel after a session. Your cues help even beginners understand the method. But your schedule has a lot of empty time slots, and you're not making as much money as you'd like—and you don't know how to improve the situation.

Being a great teacher doesn't always equal a healthy bottom line. "I've seen many outstanding teachers who don't have a full enough schedule," says Lesley Logan, Pilates manager at Equinox in West Hollywood, CA, and the author of *Profitable Pilates* (2013, L. Logan Pilates). It's not surprising when you consider most teacher-training programs don't include any business education, she adds.

So we asked experts for the sure-fire practices that will ensure that every Pilates teacher, no matter where he or she works, will have a successful, lucrative career, now and in the years ahead. (For specific tips for studio

owners, independent contractors and gym-based teachers, see sidebars.)

FIND A NICHE.

It seems counterintuitive, admits Gina Axelson, the Leucadia, CA-based founder of The Pilates Biz and the developer of the Profit with Pilates online training course, but having a specialty, such as teaching new moms, seniors or post-rehab clients, can be a great way to differentiate yourself—and for hooking clients who will need you in the long-term.

MAKE SURE PEOPLE CAN FIND YOU.

"Establish a presence on Yelp, Facebook, Citysearch or a website—you want people to be able to contact you," says Logan. She rents out space at a studio, but "everyone can find me because I have these amazing Yelp reviews," she says. (Be sure and monitor your profile to respond to any negativity, however.)

MAKING YOUR STUDIO A SUCCESS

"Many studio owners just want to teach," points out Gina Axelson. "But it's just as important that they devote time and energy to other aspects of the business," including marketing, bookkeeping, website and social media maintenance and communicating with clients. Stay savvy with these essentials:

GIVE YOURSELF A CRASH COURSE IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT.

Most studio owners don't have business training, says Dana Auriemma. "This can result in a business that isn't growing the way it could."

She recommends making a concerted effort to learn about business, marketing and management, which can help ensure the long-term success of your studio. "Reach out to friends and family members who are business owners to learn about business planning, customer service and marketing," she says. "Also seek out studio owners outside your competitive market and ask if you can interview them about their ownership experience."

"Read books and articles geared toward small business owners or entrepreneurs that cover the topics of branding, marketing and business planning," Auriemma advises. Also explore taking formal business courses or workshops, either online or at a local college.

BLOCK OUT TIME TO WORK ON THE BUSINESS.

"I advise studio owners to schedule three-hour blocks of time, for instance, every Friday morning, to work on the business," says Axelson. "If you don't, the business is

not going to do as well"—and the lack of organization can lead to burnout.

DELEGATE WHENEVER POSSIBLE.

"Find people, whether they're family or friends, who have a natural talent in, for instance, bookkeeping," suggests Axelson. Try and work out a deal, whether it involves money or favor-swapping, so that they take over some aspect of the business—and you have one less thing on your plate.

MAKE YOUR WEBSITE AN EFFECTIVE SELLING TOOL.

"Real studio photos (versus stock photos) and videos are important and valuable marketing tools, but are commonly absent from websites," says Auriemma. "These give potential clients a chance to see and get to know the studio," and have a definite impact on their interest in signing up.

Also essential for every studio's website: "Make sure you have a clear 'how-to-start' guide [that explains everything new clients need to know to sign up for sessions]," she adds. "That will make it easier for new clients to get to know the services and policies of your studio." Place it in multiple locations on your website (since visitors don't view every page).

KEEP OVERHEAD MANAGEABLE.

Avoid buying too much equipment at once or renting spaces that you'll need to work 60 hours a week to afford, says Lesley Logan. "You can always move to a bigger studio, but you'll just create problems if you can't afford your current space."

MEET THE NEIGHBORS.

Having a presence on social media is essential, but so is old-school in-person networking. "It's as simple as stopping by businesses in your area, saying 'Hi, I'm a Pilates instructor, come by and check us out,'" says Logan. "You can offer some sort of freebie, half off the first session or do an open house for people in the neighborhood."

DON'T MARK YOURSELF DOWN.

Discount programs like Groupon and Living Social don't just reduce your earnings, they diminish your value—and won't bring you long-term clients. "The people [who take advantage of these

programs] just want a discount and won't want to pay full price later," says Logan. "You charge what you charge because that's what you're worth. It might take you longer to build your business, but real clients will refer you other clients."

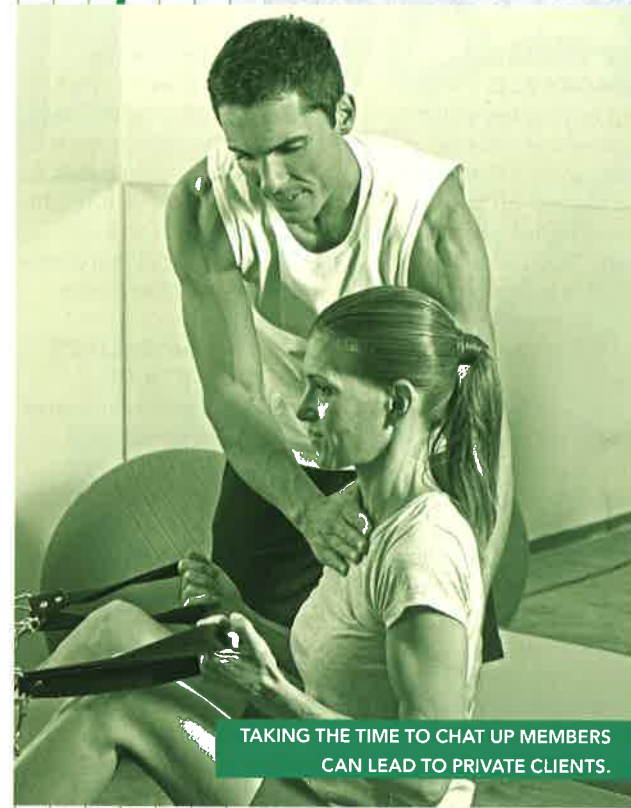
DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR YOUR STAFF.

"Provide all new employees with an organized orientation and a staff handbook that outlines their roles and responsibilities," says Auriemma. "This sets the foundation for what is expected. Second, set teaching guidelines and requirements for personal workouts and continuing education. Regularly observe and take classes from instructors to ensure high-quality teaching. Finally, treat every staff interaction as an opportunity to build a good relationship: Regularly praise and promote instructors. Hold regular staff meetings and team-building events. Model the behavior you want to see and teach instructors to do the same."



GOING THE EXTRA MILE TO KEEP YOUR STAFF ON TRACK AND MOTIVATED PAYS OFF IN THE LONG RUN.

GYM SMARTS: STRATEGIES FOR HEALTH CLUB TEACHERS



TAKING THE TIME TO CHAT UP MEMBERS CAN LEAD TO PRIVATE CLIENTS.

"It is equally important for Pilates instructors who work in a gym to market themselves in order to build their client following and professional reputation," says Dana Auriemma. Here's how:

PUT IN FACE TIME.

"Get to know co-workers, including the personal trainers and people at the front desk," advises Lesley Logan. Give them a free session, and they'll be more likely to refer members to you.

CONNECT WITH MEMBERS.

"Teachers in a health club need to try to connect with clients one-on-one whenever possible," Auriemma says. Logan recommends taking advantage of opportunities to teach group fitness

classes. "Often those members will want to try a private session on the equipment," she says.

"Allocate five minutes before and after class to talk to clients," Auriemma adds. "Walk around the room, make your body language welcoming and initiate friendly chatter. This will open up the door to more client contact and relationship-building."

EDUCATE CLIENTS.

"The challenge in a gym is to explain to members how Pilates will make the other things they're doing more effective, which requires education," says Logan. Try to get them to understand that it's not just about the number on the scale, but how things fit and how much better they feel, says Gina Axelson.

SURVIVING AND THRIVING AS AN INDEPENDENT INSTRUCTOR

Just because you work for someone else, you still need to plan for the future. "Because they don't own their own studio, independent instructors often overlook many business practices needed to successfully grow their career and clientele in the short and long term," says Dana Auriemma. Here's what you should be doing:

IDENTIFY YOUR STRENGTHS.

"There are a lot of fun, creative and rewarding career opportunities in the fitness world," says Auriemma. "Think about how you can best use your personal talents and strengths, for instance: if you want to teach, write or choreograph. After that, it comes down to identifying what resources, training, skills, education and mentors will help get them there."

DO SOME LONG-TERM PLANNING.

"Independent contractors can get stuck jumping around between different teaching spaces and trying to put together enough clients and

classes to make a living," Auriemma points out. If you find yourself in this situation, take time to make a plan. "Begin by identifying your professional goals: What's your ideal work environment, clientele, programs, specialties, responsibilities and work schedule?"

LEARN FROM THE OWNER YOU'RE WORKING FOR NOW.

If you're currently working in a studio, take advantage of the opportunity to learn. "Really pay attention to the studio owner and how they run their business," advises Amy Cady. "How do they handle clients, customer service and stress? Offer to assist them with

events, tasks or behind the desk to get an understanding of the studio's day-to-day operations. Take notes on what works and what doesn't."



IF TEACHING IS YOUR PASSION, FIND A MENTOR TO HELP GUIDE YOU.

Clients face a lot of obstacles when it comes to exercise, so think of ways to help them get psyched about Pilates.

ways to help them get psyched about Pilates. Dana Auriemma, a Philadelphia-based business consultant for fitness studios suggests "trying things like setting goals, using themes and previewing future workouts to keep clients excited. And don't be shy about inviting them to join another class or sign up for a private session." Coming up with a plan and longer-term goals for them will increase the chances you'll still be teaching them well into the future.

STAY ON TOP OF TRENDS.

"Researching what other studios were doing and charging, what classes were trending, etc., helped to guide my decisions on my next step," says Amy Cady, the owner of ABC Pilates in Laguna Niguel, CA, who started

KEEP CLIENTS MOTIVATED.

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her studio in her house 11 years ago, and has expanded four times since then. She found that staying current was also essential for weathering economic downturns, when many studios get wiped out.

MASTER THE ART OF FOLLOWING UP.

Think about all those clients you taught just once, or just for a few months; now think what your business would be like if you were still teaching them. The key to keeping clients from "disappearing" is follow-up, says Axelson. One misconception is that follow-up is annoying to clients. "But people are in fact thankful you haven't given up on them, as long as you're not being sales-y," she explains. Frame it as if you want to keep them on track or to let them know about a promotion. Statistics show that after five follow-up attempts, you have an 80 percent chance of making a sale, she notes. "Use multiple media—postcards, emails, newsletters, calls or text them" to prevent being a nag.

SOLICIT FEEDBACK.

Asking for comments and then following through on the responses, "will catapult your

success in this industry" both today and for the future, says Cady. "Ask your clients, 'How do you rate the quality of our service, staff, classes, gym/studio and my teaching on a scale of one to 10?' Then ask, 'If it is less than a 10, what can we do to make it a 10?'"

Cady says that Survey Monkey, a free online questionnaire service, is an easy way to generate feedback. "I embed it into our newsletter and offer a free gift to those who respond," she says.

GATHER TESTIMONIALS.

"It's one thing to have great credentials, but when a client can read, 'wow, you really helped me,' that goes so far," explains Axelson. "I find there are a lot of gifted teachers who have taught for years and changed hundreds of lives, but who don't have any testimonials. I get it—we're all modest—but you can't be shy about gathering them."

So what's the best way to ask? "After the lesson, if a client says, my back feels so much better, thank them and then say, you know what would really help me out is if you could write that down in a thank-you note or an

email. It takes time to gather testimonials, so it's good to start as soon as possible."

EMPHASIZE CUSTOMER SERVICE.

Call or email everyone who contacts you back—ASAP, says Logan. It shows you're responsive. And the quicker you are, the less chance that the person has to change their mind.

ALWAYS BE THINKING OF YOUR NEXT STEP.

"I knew I wanted to build a brand, which would also help keep clients coming into the studio," says Cady, who in addition to running her studio, developed a teacher-training program, created the *Skinnylates DVD*, wrote *Get The Skinny On Your Success* (2011, Amy Cady) and started a coaching business. "Each business decision has been a stepping stone to the next and involved years of experimenting."

"Listen to feedback in your environment, then set goals that are specific, measurable and attainable. Break each goal down into smaller tasks. Most importantly, find a coach—someone who has done what you want to do—and ask them for help. This will move you closer to your goal more quickly." **PS**