

6 steps to studio success

Mari Winsor shares her business strategy and savvy

Start small

"Don't get in over your head buying 17 Reformers and five Cadillacs," she advises. Go one at a time.

Persevere

Don't give up if you have a few setbacks, and don't take it personally if you don't succeed right way. Learn from your mistakes.

Hire staff with the right stuff

"Your trainers are your business," she emphasizes. "Find trainers who believe in what you believe in."

Treat staff right

"If you are fair, reasonable and kind to your trainers," she says, "they will always stand by you."

Make clients feel good about themselves

"Focus on what's positive," she says. "If you always tell people what they're doing wrong, you'll make them feel inept." Consider what kind of personality each client has—some want lots of detail, others become overwhelmed or discouraged.

Be nice

In a world where cutthroat business tactics are encouraged, Winsor knows the importance of kindness. "Always be kind, even if you feel like screaming or throwing someone out of your studio," she counsels. "And be kind to yourself. Don't be a slave to your studio."

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How a small-town girl became the queen of Pilates videos

With video sales at an estimated 12 million copies, Mari Winsor just may be the most visible symbol of Pilates today. So how did an aspiring dancer from Marshall, Michigan (population 7,000) wind up with three thriving studios in Hollywood and Los Angeles, a celebrity-studded client roster and an infomercial that has made hers a household name? Simple—a good product, business savvy and an unflagging commitment to her trainers and studios.

Winsor studied jazz and modern dance as a child and continued her training through college. Wowed by a performance of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, she set her sights on becoming a professional dancer. After working with various troupes, she settled in Los Angeles to pursue work as a choreographer, but competition was stiff in this new role. After watching her in class, Winsor's agent enthusiastically encouraged her to go back to working as a dancer—and booked her steadily.

Winsor was working as a dancer and teaching dance at the University of Southern California when Pilates first entered her life. A friend hurt her ankle and went to Kathy Grant, a former student of Joe Pilates, to help with recovery. Based on the friend's rave reviews, Winsor was intrigued enough to try it herself. Her journey had started.

After working as an instructor in someone else's studio, Winsor knew that she wanted to have her own place. "I didn't know a lot about business, but I knew how to treat people," she recalls, explaining that she wanted to create a family environment where students would feel comfortable. In 1990, with only \$5,000 in the bank and the encouragement of her faithful clients, Winsor opened her first studio in Los Angeles with borrowed equipment and a hefty dose of optimism.

During this beginning period of her Pilates career, Winsor studied with Romana Kryzanowska to increase her knowledge and teaching experience. "She knocked my socks off," Mari enthuses. "I knew this was something I could do for the rest of my life."

As a dancer, Winsor had learned how to persist through difficult times—an important asset during a series of crises, from a fire and a roof collapse in the studio to a significant California earthquake. Despite the hurdles, Winsor created a studio with a family feeling, and some of her trainers have been with her for over a decade. "There were many times I just wanted to throw in the towel, but something told me to keep going," she says. "I also had fabulous clients." Some of these clients were also famous. This strong celebrity clientele base and an offer to do a video with the direct response TV giant Guthy-Renker catapulted Winsor to stardom. The first video came out in 2002; today she's working on her 23rd.

Despite all the attention, Winsor's commitment to her clients and Pilates remains as strong as ever. "Pilates helps you," she says, "and you want to help someone else." PS

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Mari Winsor has built her empire by treating people right—and says that anyone can do the same thing.

