

The Pilates Career Path

Fitness club owners are recognizing their staff's value – and instructors are finally realizing their increased earning potential. Here's how to reap the benefits of a rapidly growing exercise frontier from both perspectives.

BY KERRIE LEE BROWN

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Industry surveys show that the demand for Pilates in fitness facilities is on the rise – which means there's an exponential increase in opportunities for instructors to enhance their careers in the Pilates arena.

According to the 2007 IDEA Fitness Programs and Equipment Survey, 68 percent of facilities surveyed have Pilates as one of their program offerings. This is a 49 percent increase compared to when IDEA first started tracking Pilates back in 1999. “The growth of Pilates has increased tremendously in fitness facilities in general, and as more and more children are exposed to Pilates through clubs, schools or other environments, the growth in Pilates programming for children will too,” states Kathie Davis, Executive Director of IDEA Health and Fitness Association.

As a result, club owners are eager to attract reputable Pilates instructors to take on this newfound demand to cater to all ages. However, many clubs are not hiring well-trained instructors from reputable organizations; trainers don't realize their teaching potential; and Pilates enthusiasts are looking elsewhere for programming.

The problem is two-fold: First, there aren't enough qualified and well-educated Pilates instructors available to meet the demands of this growing phenomenon – and second, facilities face problems with respect to implementing appropriate Pilates equipment and training capabilities to satisfy instructors.

THE BIG PICTURE

The number one obstacle facilities are faced with is implementing a professional and established Pilates program – and finding qualified staff. Often club owners have to evaluate what type of services they offer their trainers: Do they offer continuing education courses and workshop opportunities for their instructors to advance? Do they keep up with new programming options and implement them into their trainers' curriculum? Do they offer additional scheduling opportunities to trainers who instruct various programs? Is their facility equipped with the most updated equipment for high-quality Pilates instruction? Do they offer private, semi-private, or small group instruction opportunities?

Lindsay G. Merrithew, President and CEO of STOTT PILATES® supports the notion that personal training, Pilates, Yoga, and dynamic fitness instruction for all ages are poised for substantial growth over the next several years. “Much of the growth in the areas of equipment-based exercise is due to professional trainers gaining knowledge of and confidence in the results they are achiev-



Supporting your instructors' educational needs ensures they will continue to grow and hone their talents.

ing with their clients. Hence, facility owners are seeing the benefits of implementing top equipment and hiring the best trained instructors and programming directors,” he explains. “Top-quality equipment and programming equals increased membership retention.”

Supplementing trainers' income should be top-of-mind for facility operators who want to retain high-caliber instructors. For the most part, instructors want to enhance their clients' experience to help them reach their fitness goals any way they can – so expanding one's instruction skill set is very desirable and owners must take part in helping their staff reach their economic goals.

“Clubs that offer extensive programming options [and quality equipment] for members are more likely to retain clients and attract new members due to the increased interest and mystique that Pilates holds with the general public,” explains Tracey Harvey, National Sales Director, Full Solutions, STOTT PILATES®.

THE KEY FOR INSTRUCTORS

Today, more and more personal trainers and group exercise instructors have the opportunity to expand their fitness career path by advancing their career in the Pilates field. Not only can instructors broaden their horizons in a new discipline that is literally taking the fitness market by storm, but they can retain more clients, keep their interest in “personal training” or “one-on-one” instruction, and make more money in a fitness method that is growing in popularity

every day. The key to this success is access to quality education and promotion within the facility that these services exist.

“Pilates is one of the fastest-growing forms of exercise that people of all ages, fitness abilities, and levels are turning to for mind-body exercise, says Moira Merrithew, Executive Director of Education at STOTT PILATES. “Ambitious instructors, who obtain professional instruction and expand their knowledge base to include special populations covering the de-conditioned exerciser to the very fit, become very marketable.”

If facilities support their instructors' needs to learn more, then their instructors will stick around. Hence, instructors can cross-promote their training abilities and implement new and exciting fitness skills into their repertoire. Instructors have the opportunity to increase their client base with their newfound education – and a result, will be able to offer core strength, functional fitness, muscle conditioning, and mind-body exercise to enhance the lives of others.

Pilates is the perfect method of exercise to produce longer, leaner muscles, improve postural problems, increase core strength, balance strength and flexibility, heighten body awareness, and prevent injury. Group exercise instructors are also amazed at the increase in working hours they can actually put in consecutively by teaching Pilates. You can teach three to five hours of one-on-one Pilates sessions in a row. The transition from group exercise to Pilates can be quite natural considering all of the continual verbal cues in this

format of teaching. Pilates can also be customized to suit every client's needs – including rehabilitation, sport-conditioning, and pre- and post-natal exercise.

“One of the biggest obstacles that potential instructors come across when deciding whether to become certified or take Pilates courses is the cost,” states Harvey. “Quality training and the time of completion are always top of mind for instructors. The fitness world always wants a quick fix, so instructors should keep an open mind and be flexible when approaching new learning. After all, the best instructors are those who customize their teaching approaches to working with all walks of life, fitness abilities, ages, and levels in the mainstream public.”

WHERE TO TRAIN

Quality education is available throughout the world and can be brought locally to your area to meet these needs. It is important for anyone looking for good instruction or certifications to seek out organizations that provide you with the depth of knowledge and practical programming options to teach effective group or personal training programs to clients of any age or fitness level – from post-rehabilitation patients to elite athletes. After all, you want to retain clients long term and potentially even become in demand worldwide.

Often, people interested in certifying in Pilates training are not aware of their options for professional instruction, programming

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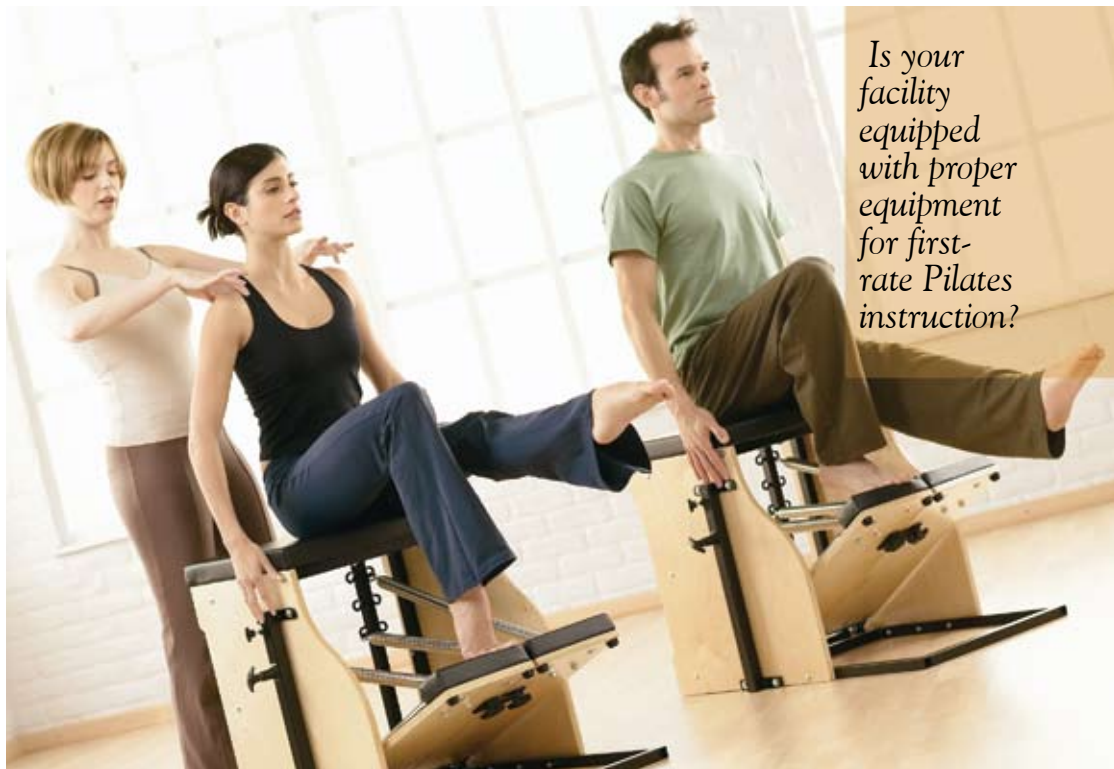
and long-lasting education. However, there are many high-caliber Licensed Training Centers (LTCs) around the globe to assist in the process. These locations have been carefully selected to deliver elite training curriculum and education and are staffed with top Certified Instructor Trainers and the best equipment on the market. These centres adhere to standards of operation that ensure consistent delivery of programs and services for those wanting to pursue a career in this exercise method.

There are also numerous fitness facilities that “host” quality Pilates courses and workshops internationally. Certified Instructor Trainers travel far and wide to offer programs from the basic fundamentals to advanced or intensive repertoires and continuing education for ambitious instructors.

Unfortunately, many teachers are obtaining their certificates through one-time weekend programs which don't require apprenticeship hours or proper qualifications of the attendee's skills before giving them a certificate. Many of the people teaching these one-weekend certification programs possess little to qualify them to do so. However,

there are a number of well respected certification programs specific to Pilates that always include observation, physical review, practice teaching, written and practical exams, and continual education after certification – including ongoing workshops and upgrading of programming/skills.

Most clients seeking any new form of exercise or training methodology tend to ask around their gym or club for verbal “references”



Is your facility equipped with proper equipment for first-rate Pilates instruction?

of trainers. Therefore it's in the best interest of the fitness facility, the client, and the individual trainer to be certified to teach Pilates to begin with. It's important that trainers, personal or otherwise, who are interested in Pilates certification research the various methods of

Pilates and examine how comprehensive their courses and certification programs are.

THE END RESULT

As the demand for Pilates instruction increases around the world, so does the demand for qualified Pilates instructors. It's in the best interest of fitness facilities to hire (and train)

well-educated instructors – and the key to success for instructors is to become up-to-date in this ever-growing method of exercise.

There's no doubt that dedicated, talented fitness instructors can increase their earning potential with additional professional Pilates training – and at the same time increase their clientele and expertise in the fitness industry as a whole. For club owners this means that their members are being taken care of and that means the potential for increased profitability. The good news is that once a client starts with Pilates equipment-based training – they are your clients long term. □



Moira and Lindsay Merrithew