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## **Pilates: Transforming Bodies and Business**

By Ken Endelman

Robyn Naymick-White has been drawn to physical activity for as long as she can remember. "I was a competitive skater, played softball, ran track and danced in the local ballet company," she says.

This love for physical activity led to her calling as a personal trainer. In 1998, she started her own personal training business, Time To Be Fit, in Sacramento, California, where she sub-contracted her services on site at several local health clubs. She also continued her dancing regimen that same year and discovered Pilates during one of her ballet trainings.

"I loved the routines and what enhanced core strength could do for the human body," Naymick-White remembers. "Its principles of core stabilization and an even musculature just made so much sense. And I could see an immediate benefit for my clients, many of whom didn't have either. It was a natural fit for me to add this to my business."

### **A Decision that Changed Her Life**

Naymick-White then began applying the exercises she had learned at some of her sub-contracted personal training sessions and found that many club members really enjoyed it. After trying another class at a fitness trade show, Naymick-White was completely convinced that Pilates was going to be huge.

"When I was done with the class, I had made a decision," says Naymick-White. "This is what I wanted to do with my life." She found a qualified instruction company and began certification in 2000. She then began to look for teaching opportunities at clubs.

As a new instructor back then, it was slim pickings to find facilities that had or would put Pilates on their schedules, let alone have Pilates equipment. So she decided to add Pilates to her own business, which, until 2000, originally offered a combination of more traditional personal training services. "It was slow at first, but over the years, as more people began to recognize the huge health benefits of Pilates, it just exploded. It went from an adjunct of my business to its focal point. Pilates now constitutes about 65% of my personal training business and 60-70% of my revenue base," says Naymick-White.

Naymick-White also has opened a brand new facility in downtown Sacramento and has a packed schedule of clients on a referral-only basis.

### **Her Keys to Success**

Why has Pilates become such a successful component in her personal training business?

"The main thing was to begin adding Pilates-based exercises to every one of my training sessions. It wasn't an option for my clients — it was a mandatory component. We did mat work and then added some prop work. It was great because they could see the results in their bodies. By the time I'd approach them to do Reformer work, they couldn't wait to get on it," says Naymick-White.

Pilates also broadened her service offering, as it gave her new tools to help work with a variety of different clients, whether from the standpoint of rehabilitation, athletic training or general health maintenance.

Many of her clients are athletes, and Pilates has helped them "tune in" to their bodies and notice imbalances. "They've found that the core strength gained from Pilates significantly helps prevent injuries. And it can actually improve their performance by teaching them how to move correctly and make the most of each movement," she says.

In addition, Pilates has also provided an additional training method to help her "special population" clients, who, for various reasons, can't use conventional gym equipment — for example, some of her older adults. "The Boomers are getting older, and they have become a big demographic for my business. Pilates has provided a strength training method that they can use — and get results — without wearing down or possibly injuring their bodies," says Naymick-White. "Some have come to me walking on a cane or crutches, and after time, they find they don't have the need for them."

### **Make the Time to Market Your Services**

Marketing was also an important component. "I have been fortunate enough to be in this business for a long time, and all my customers have come to me via word-of-mouth. But that word-of-mouth was the result of years of networking within the personal training and local community. You have to get out and meet the people."

If you don't have the connections, make them. Attend chamber of commerce meetings and meet the local business community. Create an effective demo that you can take out on the road, and conduct sessions at local businesses, schools and churches.

She also suggests creating a simple flyer outlining your services, and passing them out at local doctor's offices or rehab facilities. "These little things really will add up to new clients coming on board."

### **Education a Hurdle? Not Necessarily**

Some personal trainers perceive education as the biggest hurdle to implementing Pilates as part of their practice, but Naymick-White says that getting certified is not that difficult.

"It depends on the trainer's background. It is the biomechanics of the exercise that is important to understand. For those who have that background — say, with rehab or physical therapy — then it might be possible for them to take a weekend training session and begin teaching while taking continuing their education as needed. But a trainer who has no background in Pilates or proper biomechanics needs to get more comprehensive education before beginning to teach. The ultimate goal is to become fully certified.

"I think it is also important for the trainer to have group X experience. Many club patrons can't afford one-on-one sessions, so trainers take on small-group exercise classes as an adjunct to their income. Pilates is a perfect fit, but you must be careful to modify the exercises to meet the needs of different body dynamics, especially considering all the nuances of Pilates. Not doing so can lead to member dissatisfaction or, worst case, injury."

### **Advice for Those Who Want to Start**

Does Naymick-White have any advice for a personal trainer looking to implement Pilates as part of his or her service offering?

"Get trained on mat work first, and then get trained on props. It's a cost-efficient way to introduce Pilates workout to your clients, and you can build up to working on a Reformer from there. Once you get a steady base of clients hooked on Pilates as a whole, they're going to go nuts when they get to use the Reformer, and that gives you a variety of new revenue-based programming options.

"Finally, know that what you are doing makes a big difference in people's lives. That's the greatest thing — helping people who have lost function get it back and gain a new lease on life. It's what makes teaching Pilates an incredibly rewarding experience."

*Ken Endelman is founder and CEO of Balanced Body, the world's leading provider of Pilates equipment, education and information. For more information, please visit [www.pilates.com](http://www.pilates.com).*