



Best Advice EVER

Pilates teachers share the words of wisdom that changed their practice—and their lives.

by Anne Marie O'Connor



BELIEVE IN THE WORK

"In 1985, I started my Pilates studies in the Dancemedicine area of Center for Sports Medicine at Saint Francis Hospital in San Francisco. Orthopedic surgeon James Garrick, MD, had founded the Center, the first location in the world where Pilates instruction was integrated into a clinical setting. During an appointment with Dr. Garrick to discuss my chronic knee injury, he donned his glasses to look at my X-rays, then turned to look at me over the rims of his half frames. 'Don't you ever stop doing Pilates,' he told me. When Dr. Garrick saw my X-rays, he recognized that my knee lacked intrinsic stability. He knew that a regular, lifelong practice of Pilates would provide me with the necessary external support for my damaged joint.

"A few months later he hired me to be one of the first Dancemedicine Pilates Specialists in his Center. For over 25 years, I have followed his advice, sustaining my physical well-being and my passion for the practice of Pilates."

ELIZABETH LARKAM, Master Teacher with *Balanced Body University* and a *Passing the Torch Mentor* based in San Francisco



ENVISION YOUR OWN SUCCESS

"'What you focus on, you manifest.' An Indian shaman uttered these words to me at a party in 2004, two years after I became a teacher. I was complaining about how I was suffering from bulging discs, a drop foot nerve impingement and other orthopedic issues resulting from basketball and various surgeries. I was very negative...focusing on my pain and limitations and how I had messed myself up.

"Somehow, though, the shaman's words were very powerful to me. Within weeks of this encounter, I changed my thought process. I began focusing on what was right and my strengths; I focused on health and abundance and they came to me.

"I am manifesting more than I ever dreamed possible. I am totally pain free and I am creating my future exactly how I want it. I am now a total geek about how I feel. I honor my feelings and I know that I am the creator of my reality. I allow my thoughts to create my life exactly the way I want it to be. I am so thankful and in love with my business, family and life. I know everything is going to expand and grow as long as I am dedicated to growing and learning and helping."

ALLISON BEARDSLEY, founder and CEO, *Club Pilates* in San Diego



LISTEN TO THE CLIENT

"I was very fortunate to do my first Pilates certification with Kathy Corey. Kathy knows so much about the art of Pilates. She told us 'It's not enough to look, you must see; it's not enough to hear, you must listen; it's not enough to touch, you must feel.' Kathy said that in order to teach this work, you have to do the work and you must get it in your body and in your bones. To this day, I feel as if I'm inside someone's body when I teach!

"In regards to teaching, she also told us that we will always know more than the body in front of us and that we should only teach what we know! This was encouraging as I was nervous to teach at first, and so I remember these words in the back of my mind all the time—that I know more than my client and that I have something to offer!

"Toward the end of 2000, the Pilates manager at The Sporting Club where I work taught me a lot about the business of Pilates. She understood that as Pilates instructors we look at issues like bad posture, correct alignment and muscle weakness, but if a client wants a tight butt then we need to make sure they feel like that butt got attention! She taught me that you must listen to what the client wants and then you must provide it, but challenge the client and get them moving!"



LUCY GARCIA, Pilates manager and instructor at The Sporting Club in San Diego

LISTEN TO THE EXPERTS

"I received some of the best advice from Romana Kryzanowska when I was her apprentice back at Drago's Gym. She would say, 'The exercises that the clients like to do the least are often the ones they need the most, so keep persevering and teaching them!' I have many male clients who are self-described 'weekend warriors.' I frequently get resistance from them for focusing so much on the stretching component of Pilates, which is often a challenge for them. That is what makes it so gratifying when they come back to tell me that the decreased tightness in their legs, hips and shoulders has made a profound difference in their golf, running or skiing.

"I also received some brilliant advice when first contemplating opening my own studio. Liz, my best friend from college, who's started two successful small businesses, told me: 'First, start with a business plan. It will help you identify how to best target your client base, price your services, identify your breakeven points and even set up specific guideposts for knowing whether your business is a success.' I took the time and followed her advice, and it came in handy almost immediately. When I started my search for a studio location, I found a space that on the surface looked ideal. Looking again at the business plan, however, I realized that I would need to see at least 15 private clients a week just to break even! So instead, I found a location less than a mile down the road for almost half the rent. The studio was profitable within the first six months, hitting and exceeding the original goals set up in the business plan. Having a written business plan was essential for me when facing such tough decisions regarding location, rent and service pricing. And I believe that my low overhead was absolutely critical for the successful launch of my studio."



DEBORAH HARRIS, owner of Premier Pilates & Yoga, Warren, NJ



For a weekly dose of wisdom, check out our blog at www.pilatesstyle.com/

FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND

"Before I trained to become a Pilates teacher, I attended Mount Sinai School of Medicine. Some of the most valuable words of wisdom had nothing to do with science per se, but everything to do with life. On the first day of my gross anatomy class, Dr. Jeffrey Laitman, the head of the anatomy department and one of the most gifted teachers I know, recounted a story about the famous physician Sir William Osler. The key to success, as Dr. Osler believed and Dr. Laitman impressed upon us, is to do whatever is at hand superbly. It is simple yet spot-on advice for the multitaskers among us. I heard that sentiment over and over again in my head as I faced each new challenge in medical school; I continue to live by it daily, especially when inundated with an ever-growing list of business and life to-dos."

DO WHAT YOU DO BEST

"The best piece of advice I got was from a client who was also a successful entrepreneur. He asked, 'What is the one thing that you do that no one else can do in your business?' I said, 'No one else can teach like me.' He responded, 'Then why are you wasting your teaching energy doing the laundry and cleaning the space? If you invest just a little and pay someone to do the things that drain you, you'll have more time and energy to do the thing you do best—teach!' It was a financial risk, but I took his advice and he was absolutely correct. By eliminating some of the maintenance tasks from my schedule, I was able to spend more time practicing, studying and teaching. Seven years later, after tripling my space, I still believe paying someone to do laundry, etc., is one of the most important line items in my yearly budget!"



CARRIE MCCULLOCH, MD,
medical director of
Kinected in New York



JENNA ZAFFINO,
owner and director
of Helios Center for
Movement, Chicago



CONNECT TO THE WORK

"One of the most memorable pieces of advice I've ever gotten was from Joan Breibart [founder of the PhysicalMind Institute]. When I had completed my first Pilates teacher training, I remember she told me, 'Pilates is like peeling an onion. Just when you think you know everything there is to know about it, it's time to peel away a layer and expose a deeper connection to the work. Continue to learn from everyone...yourself, your students, other teachers, mentors. Never stop.'

"Another important bit of advice was from my yoga teacher mentor, Beryl Bender Birch. She said, 'Practice. All is coming.' In other words, the only way to understand the work is to do the work. To this day I can hear both of their voices giving me this advice, and I have followed that advice daily since!"



CONNIE BORHO, owner/director of Balance
Pilates and Yoga Centers in West Bradenton, FL,
Second Generation Lolita San Miguel Master
Teacher and Peak Pilates Senior Teacher Trainer

GO WITH YOUR STRENGTHS

"The best advice anyone ever gave me came from my husband, who is an entrepreneur and has created and sold several businesses. As I was transitioning from my home studio into a larger studio, I was trying to decide what types of classes to offer—group or private, duos or trios, machines or mat. A lot of teachers kept telling me that group classes are where the money is, and that I should concentrate on those. I found, however, that in my small home studio my clients progressed faster with one-on-ones and I got more satisfaction from teaching them.

"My husband advised me to stick to my guns and offer only private classes in a private setting. Other studios were charging the same as I was for 'privates,' but stuffing six teachers and their clients in the same equipment room. He said that I could give my clients a better experience by keeping it one-on-one and I would have more client retention, with a clientele who could afford my services in the long term. Group-class clients, he said, would be the first to stop Pilates during difficult economic times, while private class clients would be more 'recession-proof.'

"It turned out that he was right. I have had very high client retention; most of my clients have taken anywhere from two to five private classes per week for the past five years. My income has been steady since I decided to concentrate on private (and duo) classes without any drop in attendance from the financial crisis. I even had to hire other teachers who help me to teach my now overflowing book. The feedback I get from new clients is that the truly private setting really helps them to concentrate and work deeper without distraction, a real luxury in today's crowded Pilates environment."



ERIN MOHR, founder of *Pilates Privé, Paris*

DO WHAT YOU LOVE

"On the day of my high-school graduation my father said to me, 'Carrie, the key to life is to find something you love to do and then find a way to make money doing it.' My father was a writer and lived by that same code. Soon after graduation, I became a professional dancer. It was my passion and now I was able to find a way to make money doing it! When that career came to an end due to injuries, I thought back to my father's words of wisdom. In that moment, the only thing I loved to do other than ballet was Pilates. Pilates allowed me to move my body without pain, plus I was also intrigued by the precision of the technique of the method. So I got certified and started teaching. I often think to myself that the reason I am successful at what I do is because I truly love doing it. Yes, the paycheck is nice but it isn't my motivation. When you teach from your heart, success will follow."



CARRIE CAMPBELL, owner of *Positively Pilates, Hoboken, NJ*

NEVER STOP LEARNING

"Regarding great words of wisdom, I got two nuggets. Both came from Troy McCarty of White Cloud Studios in Cleveland, and both came my first year of teaching full time. First, he told me to take any class, any workshop, any opportunity possible to learn from other teachers. He advised that even if I didn't share a style with them, I would always walk away with something of value.

"He also gave me what is probably the most important advice I've ever been given in my life. He looked me in the eye and said, 'You have great instincts. Don't be afraid to trust them.' In May, I will have been teaching for nine years—I've never once regretted trusting my instincts."



MARCIA POLAS, founder of *polaspilates, Denver*

Anne Marie O'Connor is the executive editor of Pilates Style.