

How to be Their Best Pilates Instructor – Ever!

By Helen M. Ryan

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.” –Lao Tzu

Years ago, a general assumption in the fitness world was that the sign of a “good” instructor was boasting a high number of people who “drop” out of your classes during the hour. The more people walked out because of the workout’s difficulty, the better you were as an instructor (because you were fit!).

What were we thinking?

Since my return to teaching group exercise classes nine years ago, I have learned that being a good instructor is easy, but being a great instructor is much harder. And it doesn’t matter how many students drop out of your class. If anything, you want them to finish strong and come back to the next class for more!

Going from good to great

There are many ways you can go from good to great, and while you may not always be “the best instructor they ever had”, you can be the best that you can be and make a difference. As a great instructor, you have important roles and responsibilities:

- You are a leader, coach, and cheerleader.
- You read the people in your classes and adjust your workouts according to the mood and energy of the group.
- You balance giving students a good, solid workout that builds up their fitness, not tear it down.
- You constantly educate yourself and your class participants, arming them

with new tools for success each and every time they walk out of the room.

- You strive to be the “best hour of their day” no matter how you are personally feeling. They showed up to your class, so they deserve your focus, attention and passion.
- You set the bar in terms of work effort, but you also let your students see your human side (“Did you eat too much candy this weekend? Me too!”, “Whoa, that was hard, but we did it!”).
- You empower them to feel successful, rewarding their efforts with genuine compliments and reminding them that they don’t have to be perfect all the time. Trying is good enough.
- You help them feel okay and remind them that sometimes it’s perfectly fine to go a little easier in class. As long as they show up, they are a success in your book.
- You care about your students, their lives and their goals.

Most of us are in this business for one reason: we want to help make a difference, and we are passionate about what we do. While there are a few instructors in it for, as Lady Gaga would say, “the applause,” those instructors are flashes in the pan—here one day, gone the next, onward to the next round of applause somewhere else. Unlike days past, I now aim to keep people in my classes, not drop them in the first 20 minutes. I want someone to leave a class feeling confident and strong, not feeling that they “could never do” what I am doing in class. I am their coach, their guide and their cheerleader, but not their ruler.

Ultimately, I want class participants to know that they succeeded on their own.

“We did it ourselves!” Yes indeed. You did.