

RESEARCH ALERT: IS THE MAT BETTER THAN THE APPARATUS FOR BACK PAIN? (PAGE 26)

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“I get by with a little help from my friend.”

Having another Pilates teacher open a studio right around the corner could have been Keirsten Shaffer’s worst nightmare. But instead, she and Sarah Badger pooled their resources to benefit both of their businesses.

ABOVE: KEIRSTEN SHAFER CUES A CLIENT INTO THE STARTING POSITION FOR SNAKE.

KEIRSTEN SHAFER HAS OWNED LILA PILATES IN PERRY, A SMALL RESORT TOWN IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, SINCE 2012. “Perry is very rural and very agricultural, but nearby Silver Lake and Letchworth State Park (aka the Grand Canyon of the East) are a big draw for people from all over.” Shaffer’s studio has all Balanced Body equipment, including two Reformers, a Trapeze Table, a Chair and a Step Barrel, and also offers yoga and massage therapy.

“A few years ago, I asked Sarah Badger, a Pilates and dance instructor, to teach a few group mat classes in my studio,” Shaffer recalls. “At the time, her dance studio was about 40 minutes away.”

But then in 2016, Badger opened Genesee Dance Theatre School, which offered mat Pilates, dance, barre and yoga classes, right around the corner from Lila Pilates.

While many studio owners would have freaked out, Shaffer realized the arrival of her new “competitor” was in fact a stroke of luck. “Around the time that Sarah moved to Perry, I began training to get my New York State massage therapy license (1,000 hours of training at a school an hour away from my studio). We came up with a plan: Sarah would teach my private clients and my group mat classes while I was at school. This helped her earn extra revenue her first year of opening her ballet studio in Perry, and I wasn’t forced to close my studio for six months while in massage therapy school.

“We continued our collaboration when I returned full-time to my studio in April 2017. Now we both

teach private equipment sessions and group Reformer classes in my studio, and we both teach group mat classes in her studio. We also offer a full range of other services (ballet, massage therapy, neurokinetic therapy).

“Our clients pay our respective businesses for services rendered,” Shaffer says. “In general, we just pay our individual studio bills. Sarah pays Lila Pilates 20 percent of the fees she collects from teaching private equipment sessions and small-group Reformer classes in my space. We each have and manage our own websites (lilapilates.com and geneseedance.org). I am also constantly promoting Sarah’s group classes to my massage therapy clients and to my private clients who need to move more yet can’t afford to add more private sessions.”

So far, the partners haven’t felt the need for a written contract. “In general, all of our communication is in writing via email, so we can always refer back to what we said or promised,” she says. “In fact, I believe a written contract would limit us from being adaptive.”

“In a small town, where it’s been a challenge to stay open and vibrant, we could have been each other’s worst competitor, but instead, we’ve maintained a tight collaboration and friendship for over three years.”

CONSIDER THIS BUSINESS MODEL IF: you’re in a small town; there’s a studio or other business nearby that offers complementary services.

“I rent a room at my local school.”
—Corinne Lloyd, Melksham, England

WHY I CHOSE THIS BUSINESS MODEL:

I’ve spent 25 years in the fitness industry and 15 in Pilates, but for the past two years I have run an independent business for the first time because I now have two boys, Joseph, five, and Jasper, three. I’m home with them all day, then teach at night. My husband is very supportive and takes over when he comes in from work.

I rent space in the local school. It was a new location for the school, and

it had a state-of-the-art underfloor heated gym hall. I just mentioned the classes on the school parents’ Facebook page and got nine people right away. Classes grew fairly quickly, and I now teach seven classes with 12 people in each, all of whom heard about it via word of mouth. I book students in blocks of six weeks, and they pay in advance; then I pay the school the rent, also in six-week blocks.

WHY THIS SUITS ME: I get the best of both

worlds—I earn an income, and also get to be home with my children. The school is within walking distance, which is handy. My rent goes back into the school, which my child attends, so it’s a win-win. There are also great social aspects to the business, which is very important to me. We have days out and a Christmas party. I organize an awards ceremony, where I hand out cheap plastic Oscars for serious categories (most inspiring person) and fun (best heckle in class).



CONSIDER THIS BUSINESS MODEL IF: you’re a stay-at-home parent; you want to stay close to home; you’re in a small town or suburb where schools double as community gathering places.

ABOVE: CORINNE LLOYD HELPING HER STUDENT, CARLY HAWKINS, RECRUIT HER POWERHOUSE IN A MAT CLASS SHE OFFERS AT A LOCAL SCHOOL.

“I teach Pilates classes in my former apartment, in corporate settings and in community centers.”
—Barbara Tobisch, Enns, Austria

WHY I CHOSE THIS BUSINESS MODEL:

Rent in Austria is very expensive, and therefore it is very hard (though not impossible) to run your own studio, plus you’re always in competition with the community centers and clubs that often offer Pilates for a lower price.

I teach four small-group Pilates sessions at my former apartment, which is on the second floor of my parents’ house; they let me use it for free.

I also rent rooms in three community centers in the area, where I teach five classes a week, including two classes for moms with babies. Every semester (fall/winter and

spring/summer), I plan the courses, send the managers of the center the information, and they book the room. They then print a brochure with all the course listings, which is mailed to every home in town.

At two of the community centers, I am paid per student; at the third, I’m paid a flat fee. In March, I will start renting the room at one of the centers, and the students will pay me directly. I will have to handle the registration myself, but it will be possible to earn more money, because I will get paid per person, and a lot of participants register for my classes.

I also teach four classes a week at local-area companies that offer Pilates as part of their occupational health care for their workers. The corporations pay me directly—it’s either a negotiated fee per student or a flat rate.

Beside Pilates, I teach other sports classes, too. (I also have an MA in educational science.)

WHY THIS SUITS ME:

I like the variety of teaching “regular” Pilates, Pilates for moms with babies and teaching a few other sports courses. It requires me to stay creative to find new setups and content.



In Austria, people don’t like to drive long distances—more than 15 or 20 kilometers (or nine or 12 miles) to get to courses. So even if it’s sometimes stressful to drive so much, it helps to move around.

CONSIDER THIS BUSINESS MODEL IF:

you live in a rural area or small town; your potential students are spread across a wide geographic area; you like a variety of clients. **PS**

ABOVE: BARBARA TOBISCH’S BUSINESS MODEL ALLOWS HER TO TEACH A VARIETY OF CLIENTS; HERE, SHE GUIDES A CLIENT THROUGH THE SIDE-LYING SERIES WITH A BALL.

PATTERN BY MIA, DESIGNS/FREPIK; KEIRSTEN PHOTO BY SARA STABLEY; PHOTO COURTESY OF CORINNE LLOYD; BARBARA PHOTO BY JUERGEN TOBISCH