

FINDING THEIR TRUE CALLING

Dissatisfied with their previous careers, these teachers reveal how they made Pilates their life's work. *by Anne Marie O'Connor*



LUCIE RENKENS, NASHVILLE

PREVIOUS CAREER: Advertising. I was a vice president at a branding and advertising agency in Cincinnati. Then in 2009, I took a job in Nashville as the director of marketing at a health-care company. I thought it would allow me to pursue health and wellness, but it was more about selling services and office politics.

WHY PILATES: After just a few classes, I could see a benefit beyond other fitness classes. I was hooked.

TRAINING: Pendleton Pilates in Cincinnati, certified in 2009.

BABY STEPS: While I was still working at the advertising agency, I was hired part time to teach privates, initials and group classes at Pendleton Pilates.

MAKING THE LEAP: When my corporate job in Nashville turned out to be a disappointment, I realized I should try Pilates. I was willing to give up a six-figure income for a job that fulfilled me. If I failed, I knew there would be other corporate jobs. Before leaving my job, I saved for about six months. I made cutbacks to

my lifestyle—no dinners out, no shopping, no pedicures, etc.

DREAM COMING TRUE: My approach was very conservative because a friend had taken out a big loan to open a studio, even though she didn't yet have a steady clientele; eventually she was forced to close it. I was fortunate I had a large space in my house I didn't use. I opened 12South Pilates in my home in October 2011, with a Reformer, a mat, a Magic Circle and two clients.

I continued to teach at a local gym for a year and a half so I'd have some income until I had enough business at my studio.

SKILLS SHE USES FROM HER PREVIOUS CAREER: My marketing and branding experience was a big help. A

designer friend helped me create a professional logo and website. The logo gave me credibility and gave people the impression my business had been around for a while. It also allowed me to charge a fair rate. I also started writing weekly blogs and sending out a monthly newsletter—all things I had had experience with.

NEW SKILLS SHE NEEDED TO DEVELOP: I was never a salesperson, and this aspect made me uncomfortable, so I had to work on selling myself and my business. I also had to learn the value of what I was doing. It took me a while to be firm about my pricing and cancellation policy.

BEST THING ABOUT HER NEW CAREER: I love hearing students acknowledge their own success. It is one thing for me to see it, but another when they can say, I am so much stronger, or my posture has really improved, or look at my range of motion, etc. I finally feel fulfilled.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING OWNERS: Keep in mind it may take a little longer than you think. One of my mentors said he had seen many people who wanted to throw in the towel just before becoming successful.



DEBORAH CASSEL, KIHAI, HI

PREVIOUS CAREER: Finance. I was a credit manager for Wells Fargo Financial Acceptance, and solicited auto loans for the subprime market, reviewed

credit applications, collected late payments and repossessed vehicles when needed.

WHY PILATES: It allowed me to balance my body after snowboarding, my biggest hobby at the time. It also taught me the true meaning of the importance of the mind and body connection.

TRAINING: Polestar studio training, completed in 1999. Since then, I have trained with PhysicalMind Institute and STOTT PILATES®, and under classical instructors.

BABY STEPS: I was offered a teaching position for few hours in the evening after my workday at the finance company.

MAKING THE LEAP: A few months later, in 2000, I quit my finance job and started teaching at five different studios.

DREAM COMING TRUE: I started teaching two classes at Pilates of Cherry Creek in Denver. Six months later, in November 2008, I was asked to buy out one of the owners.

Two years ago, another teacher told me about a studio for sale in Maui. My dream was to own a studio near the ocean and Denver, and this came pretty close. I ended up purchasing Pilates Maui in Kihei, HI, in 2013.

SKILLS SHE USES FROM HER PREVIOUS CAREER: The most important skill I learned was to ask for the business. When you show passion for your work, there is no hard selling involved.

NEW SKILLS SHE NEEDED TO DEVELOP: Slowing things down to meet the goals I have set.

BEST PART ABOUT HER NEW CAREER: Making an impact on the lives of my clients.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING OWNERS: Buying an existing

studio is a great way to transition because it already has a presence in the community.



VANESSA WASHICHECK, MADISON, WI

PREVIOUS CAREER: Teacher. I was a Community Learning Specialist for K-5 schools in the Madison school district for seven years. I oversaw the after-school child-care program and enrichment clubs (dance, art, sports, etc.).

WHY PILATES: The more I learned about the method, the more I wanted to devote my life to practicing and teaching it.

TRAINING: A 40-hour apprenticeship at Pilatespa; a 450-hour teacher-training course under the direction of Ronda Arndorfer of Movement Center Pewaukee, completed in 2013; finishing up the Romana's Pilates teacher-training program in Champaign, IL.

BABY STEPS: I taught Pilates and barre six days a week in local studios while still working full time for the school district.

MAKING THE LEAP: In September 2013, I quit my job and rented a small space within another fitness studio. This is the best way to start "from scratch"—my rent was low, and I could network with other fitness professionals and meet potential clients.

DREAM COMING TRUE: I expanded to a fully outfitted studio, Pilates Central in Madison, WI, one year later.

I obtained a personal loan and a business line of credit. I was able to purchase used equipment from a colleague, which allowed me to open for business without depleting all of my cash.

SKILLS SHE USES FROM HER PREVIOUS CAREER:

My teaching experience has helped me provide meaningful instruction to my adult students. It requires a great deal of patience to introduce a complex discipline such as Pilates.

NEW SKILLS SHE NEEDED TO DEVELOP:

The greatest challenge is the crazy schedule! I was used to fairly regular and consistent hours, and so it has been challenging to adjust to very long days in the studio. Luckily, I love the sense of accomplishment that comes with building a studio from the ground up.

BEST PART ABOUT HER NEW CAREER:

The close relationships I have with my students and my ability to see them progress in their practice to become happier and healthier people.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING OWNERS:

Be prepared to make changes to your lifestyle

to offset your expenses. Cut back on unnecessary expenses, and you will be surprised how much you will save!



NANCY REEPER,
NEW YORK CITY

PREVIOUS CAREER: Nurse. I have always worked in a large hospital settings, in the pediatrics department and the neonatal intensive-care unit.

WHY PILATES: I had lower-back issues, so I started taking Reformer classes at my gym in 2002. Pilates was the only thing that let me feel strong and pain free.

TRAINING: Kane School of Core Integration in NYC, certified in 2010.

BABY STEPS: Most studios want a minimum 20-hour-a-week commitment, but I still had a full-time job. So I started teaching in-home privates, as this gave me flexibility.

MAKING THE LEAP: My goal for 2015 is to pursue Pilates full time. I'm weighing my options. I have had a couple of offers to teach on staff at a studio. Another idea is to get a larger apartment so I can teach from home. This would minimize my costs, but I have to think about how that will affect my family. I have also been looking at [commercial] spaces.

I have been saving money. My goal has been to save enough to pay for the equipment up front. I'm used to a steady paycheck, benefits and health insurance, so it's

exciting and scary all at the same time. My backup plan is to work at a hospital maybe two to three days a month for extra money.

SKILLS SHE USES FROM HER PREVIOUS CAREER:

Listening. It is so important to assess what a client needs and what they want to accomplish.

NEW SKILLS SHE NEEDED TO DEVELOP:

As a nurse, I know human anatomy, but learning the anatomy of movement was completely different.

BEST PART ABOUT HER NEW CAREER:

Seeing someone accomplish something they never thought they could do.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING OWNERS:

The business side of starting a business has been the most overwhelming for me. But I have done a lot of research online and at the library. The library has a lot of great resources.



MEGAN BAXTER BARROW,
BOSTON

PREVIOUS CAREER:

Insurance. I worked at a large consulting firm, helping various companies' human-resource departments design their medical, dental and other benefit programs.

WHY PILATES: When I was in college, I was in a car accident that resulted in two surgeries for disc herniation. I still had pain, so I started doing mat Pilates. My pain started to

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lessen, but the long hours sitting at a desk as a consultant really took a toll on my body. So I started to look into Pilates certification programs.

TRAINING: Balanced Body at Boston Body Pilates, certified in 2013.

BABY STEPS: I started working part time at Boston Body while I continued to work at my consulting job. I was very diligent about saving and paying off any debt. Three years ago, I moved in with my boyfriend (now husband), which also helped, as we could split expenses.

MAKING THE LEAP: In January 2013, I left my corporate job and picked up more hours at Boston Body.

DREAM COMING TRUE: Currently, I'm a senior Pilates instructor at Equinox in Boston. I teach between 20 and 24 equipment sessions in the Pilates studio plus two Pilates/abdominal classes a week. I'm also the owner of MyCoreology, which does special Pilates events and in-home Pilates sessions. I train three-to-four clients in their homes every week. Eventually I want to own my own studio.

SKILLS SHE USES FROM HER PREVIOUS CAREER: Communication. As a consultant, it is important to communicate clearly and effectively with both clients and co-workers to get your solutions across. It's the same with Pilates.

NEW SKILLS SHE NEEDED TO DEVELOP: Slowing down. In my previous career, everything was in a time crunch. Once I was able to apply the Pilates principles of relaxation and breathing, it became easier to get my clients to experience them.

BEST PART ABOUT HER NEW CAREER: Definitely my clients. I get to work with a wide variety of people: young, old, athletic,

injured and the list continues. My job never gets dull, and I love seeing each person progress and feel better.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING OWNERS: Compare your salary then versus now on an hourly basis. This year, I am on track to make the same as my base salary as a consultant—but I'm working 30 hours a week versus my previous job, when I sometimes worked more than 70 hours a week.



NICKOLA BALES-SMITH,
DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

PREVIOUS CAREER: PR and marketing. I founded my own firm, SimplyBuzz, in 2006 in Johannesburg. We worked to get positive exposure for our clients, luxury-lifestyle brands in the health and wellness, spa and travel industries.

WHY PILATES: Tash Barnard, a BASI teacher trainer in South Africa, was a client of mine. I started taking classes with her, and fell in love with the movement and discipline. Before I knew it, I was doing my BASI instructor training.

TRAINING: Tash B Pilates, certified in 2011.

BABY STEPS: I began teaching Pilates mat classes at the Umhlali Country Club while still running my firm.

DREAM COMING TRUE: In January 2012, I moved with my husband to Dundee, a small town in a rural area. I started my own small Pilates studio, Pilates

MY JOB NEVER GETS DULL, AND I LOVE SEEING EACH PERSON PROGRESS AND FEEL BETTER.

For Life, on the same property as a local B&B.

I first set a budget and did a small business plan, skills I'd used before. I only taught mat Pilates, so my overhead costs were much lower than that of a studio with equipment. (Those costs are extortionate here in South Africa.) I took out ads in our local paper and teamed up with our local physiotherapist and biokineticist, as well as some of the local sports groups, e.g., mountain bikers and runners.

I had a little saved and my husband also helped with some setup costs, plus he already owned a house here. This past January, we moved to Durban, the second-largest city in South Africa, where I hope to open another studio.

SKILLS SHE USES FROM HER PREVIOUS CAREER: Communication is vital in any business, especially when working with people.

NEW SKILLS SHE NEEDED TO DEVELOP: My patience. Sometimes there is resistance from clients to trying new movements, and this requires encouragement, positive feedback and patience.

BEST PART ABOUT HER NEW CAREER: You are helping and educating people every day. Seeing the change and transformation is so inspiring and motivating. I feel like I make a difference! **PS**