

9 Lessons From Highly Successful Fitness Business Owners



classpass

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In the fitness community, there is no shortage of leaders who have built their studios into successful businesses. So, we asked a few for their tips and advice when starting a new business, and the lessons they have learned along the way. Their answers come from real-world experience – the trials and triumphs of studio ownership.

If you're exploring the idea of ownership, just starting your business, or pausing for extra insight along the way, this e-book will help you discover what highly successful fitness business owners want you to know.

1

Build Community

From customers to instructors and staff, to the fitness community at large, every successful studio has one thing in common: a thriving community. Learn how three successful fitness business owners have built community in different ways.

Create a Positive Instructor–Student Dynamic

For Megan Hanson, owner of [High Ride Cycle](#) in Denver, community starts with the instructor–student relationship. “Working out can be intimidating for some people and it is important to make clients feel welcomed, comfortable and successful. This starts with your team. Every time a client walks in the door, our team greets them to make them feel welcomed into our community.” By ensuring your staff is equipped to handle and support clients from all walks of life, and all levels of fitness, you can build a truly healthy community.

This is especially important when you’re introducing new customers to the studio. A strong community is built over time through strong relationships, all of which begin when

a new customer walks through the door. Therefore, the first step to community is [preparing your instructors to welcome new guests](#). Megan details how High Ride Cycle does it: “We get to know existing clients’ names, stories and goals to build a relationship with each rider.” Ensure they make time to chat with new students, learn about their fitness level and goals and support them through positive teaching techniques. The key is to equip your instructors for coaching – not just teaching. With a coach mindset your instructors will learn to prioritize growth and true learning, setting up clients for long-term success (and hopefully long-term relationships with the studio).

It's hard to relinquish control, but delegation will be one of your lifelines as your business begins to grow.

Surround Yourself with the Right People

Your community starts with the people you surround yourself with, and for a fitness business owner that includes your instructors and staff. Rachel Blumberg, founder and CEO of [PLATEFIT](#) in Los Angeles, knows how important a strong business community is. "I've learned to hire people who share my vision, my drive for growth and my desire to grow my brand. I surround myself with people smarter than myself. I've learned to delegate to people who are experts in areas that I am not." This is an extremely valuable lesson for new studio owners who might be trying to do too much on their own. It's hard to relinquish control, but delegation will be one of your lifelines as your business begins to grow.

As Rachel advises, the key is in finding staff who share your vision, and who fill in proficiency gaps. From offering different teaching styles and fitness genre experience to delivering behind-the-scenes expertise and administrative skills, a well-stacked roster of professionals helps you create a balanced, full-service business.

When hiring instructors, make sure you keep these [7 tips in mind](#). It's good practice to see recruiting as an ongoing process. Always have your eyes peeled for talent, and be ready to meet opportunities as they arise. Remember that instructors aren't the only staff you need; as you start out it can be tempting to DIY your back-of-house tasks, like marketing and finances, in order to save money. This might work for some, but if you're not particularly skilled in these areas, or you simply can't keep up, consider working with independent contractors to help you balance out your business.

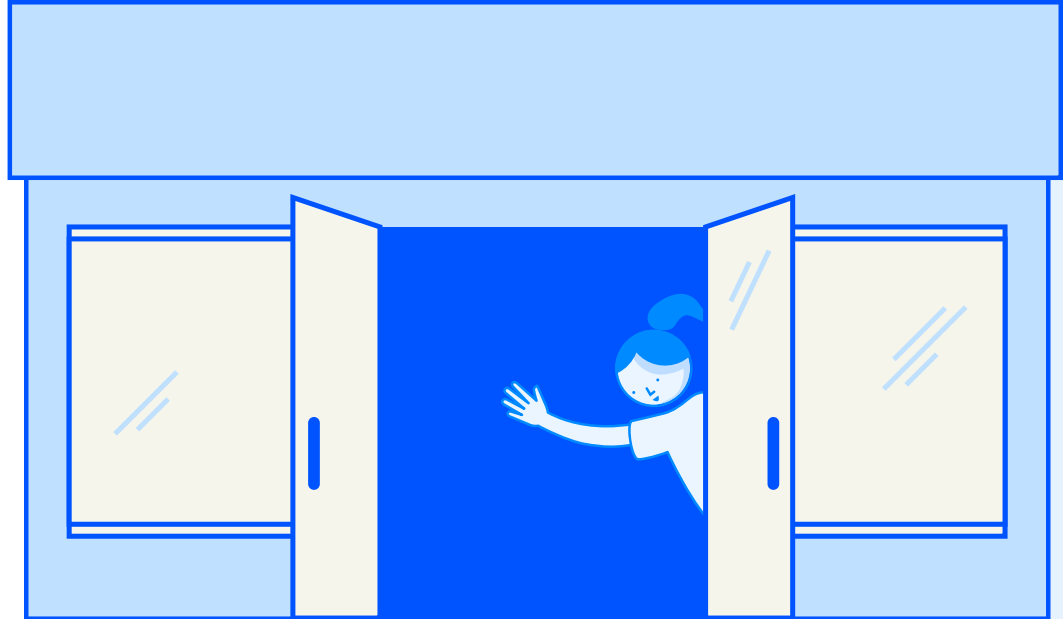
Read more about [the importance of delegating](#).

Look Beyond Your Studio

To build a strong, thriving community, you need a diverse and open-minded approach. Remember to look beyond the walls of your studio – there is likely a strong local community that can help you engage with business in new ways and inspire new ideas. As the owner of [Session Pilates](#) in Dallas, Brittany Grignon finds powerful connections in the community outside of her studio. “Session really focuses on supporting not only local businesses but other fitness concepts. It has been one of my favorite things to witness to see studios supporting other studios by taking classes, promoting them on social media and overall understanding that we are here to build each other up.”

Whether you focus on the local fitness community around you, or you expand your sights to any local small businesses, the new perspective will benefit you as a business owner and help your studio settle into the neighborhood. When you meet the community in unexpected places, you’ll gain more insight into what they want.

This might be hard for some new fitness owners to prioritize, as you want to spend all of your time nurturing your own space. It’s easy to develop tunnel vision when you’re running a business, but it’s to the detriment of your studio’s success. Make connections and stay on top of movements in your local community in order to learn, prepare and grow your own business.



2

Make Customers Your Top Priority

Fitness is an extremely personal journey for most, and when a student enters your studio they're tentatively inviting you on that journey. It's part of fitness instruction to respect, support and coach every type of student. These three pros have figured out that great customer service is indispensable in this line of work; here are their tips for putting the customer first at your own studio.

Maximize Value

Placing her customers first is the driving principle of Zsoka Bernard, owner of [Balanzs](#) in the Netherlands. "When you start your business, focus on the value you are going to give to your customers! I see so many business owners having fancy cash flow statements and ambitious growth plans but they seem to forget that it all starts with the value you are going to give to your customers. Make that value as massive as possible!"

Satisfying customer wants and needs doesn't have to slow you down - in fact, for most boutique studios, it's the only way forward. With a customer-value attitude like Zsoka's, you'll learn how to balance your business plan against the

reality of your studio, which revolves around how guests are feeling. When it comes down to growth decisions, you might find that better coaching is more important than more class times, or that a bigger studio might come after more repeat customers. See how adding customer value adds to your revenue, and grows the reputation of your business as an excellent studio for customer satisfaction.

[Discover 10 tips to deliver more value to customers.](#)

From free towels to a more beginner-friendly environment, these suggestions will get you thinking in the value-adding framework.

A hospitable environment starts with your instructors

Focus on Hospitality

There's a golden word when it comes to customer experience: hospitality. It might seem like the two are one in the same, but the distinction is important – hospitality is how you treat your customers, from how they're greeted at the door, to how they're treated throughout the class, to how they feel leaving your studio. Barbie Bent, owner and founder of [Lagree West](#) in Vancouver, is a believer in hospitality. "Guest experience trumps everything. Setting high customer service standards and delivering on these is crucial, but even more important is a consistent focus on hospitality. Hire staff that genuinely care about how people feel and this will come naturally."

Getting hospitality right is straightforward – be friendly and welcoming to your students. Like Barbie says, a hospitable environment starts with your instructors. Even one instructor who doesn't place the customer's experience first can eat away at the entire atmosphere of your studio, earning you a bad review or losing you a customer.

There are a [few things you and your instructors can avoid](#) to improve your hospitality:

- Rushing out right after a class has ended
- Taking photos without permission
- Refusing modifications to make workouts easier – or harder!
- Showing off instead of teaching

Start Conversations

Felicia Alexander, the co-founder and president of [BoxUnion](#) in Los Angeles, makes a consistent effort to hear her community. “The community we have built is the core of our business and we always look to their voice when making any decisions around the class and the brand.” Listening can look take a lot of shapes. Take a page out of Felicia’s book: “We utilize programs like Listen 360 and Survey Monkey to easily and consistently collect information as well as more local (and often more fun) tools like an old school suggestion box in the lobby or, my personal favorite, just talking to everyone I possibly can after class.” She covers a few methods – survey tools, suggestion box and simple conversation, but it doesn’t stop there. Social media can be a great place for social listening; stay alert for mentions of your name or branded hashtags to help you start conversations with the community.

Feedback loops serve a two-sided purpose: they improve customer experience, and they help you grow your business. When you survey your existing customers, you learn about what

they expect from their studio experience. When you execute on this feedback, you’re creating more value for them and increasing the value of your business. A feedback culture like this is highly customer-oriented, and it’s hard to be any other way when you’re in the boutique fitness business.

Learn [how to better utilize feedback](#) to understand your clients and improve their experience.

Cultivate Feedback Culture



surveys



suggestion box



conversation

3

Balance Your Vision With Good Business

It's easy to get carried away with ambitious projects, grand visions and enthusiastic plans when you're revving up your business. But like with any venture, you need a solid business plan and daily management to start seeing results. Here are three lessons from pros who balance their big ideas with the right organizational outlook.

Put Consistency Before Growth

Like achieving fitness goals, your fitness business won't get anywhere without consistency. "I believe consistency can often be the most difficult part of any business, but it is hands down one of the most important tools for success," says Todd Wadler, co-founder and CEO of BoxUnion in Los Angeles. "As I often tell my team, it's not just about jumping between great ideas – it's also about following through with execution and ongoing implementation day after day. It takes time and discipline, but consistency is the gas that keeps the machine running." No business can maintain long-term success without keeping up with day-to-day functions.

There are many exciting benchmarks when you're running a fitness business: the first client, a new class added to the line-up, the first month you break even. With these milestones come new opportunities, but don't get ahead of yourself. Focus on building a strong foundation, and as you grow continually, reinforce this foundation with new lessons and the new business functions you've picked up along the way. When it's time to add a new class or even open a new location, you'll be able to see the project through to its end because of the strong roots you have developed.

Consistency means staying in the know about your business's health. Monitor [these key metrics](#) on a daily, weekly or monthly basis for insight into performance.

Pad Your Plans

Money isn't the most inspiring topic for ambitious self-starters, but it's something you definitely can't ignore. When asked about advice for new fitness business owners, D.J. Martin, co-owner of [Tangerine](#) in Brooklyn, had some practical tips. "Plan on everything taking at least two times longer and costing two times what you are projecting. This includes not only any construction and build-out, but also building class attendance. So make sure you have sufficient cash reserves so you can afford the time it will inevitably take for your new studio to become busy and vibrant."

Despite all your best efforts, many projects you initiate will take longer than you originally expected, and that extra time will mean added cost. Don't let this deter you from ambitious ideas. Rather, let D.J.'s principles help you create a realistic plan that accounts for time and financial contingencies.

Get more tips for big plans, like [expanding your business](#).

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Double Down on Your Mission Statement

This last piece of advice is one that should resonate with any founder or owner. Katherine Mason, founder and CEO of Atlanta's [SculptHouse](#), always comes back to why she started her business. "It's so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day grind, but I've found that when I focus on my company's mission – to help our clients and staff lead healthier, more confident lives through fitness and fashion – it keeps me focused and able to prioritize the needs of our company and clients and execute strategies accordingly." It's this why that will guide you through business decisions both big and small.

While your goals and objectives will evolve as your business fluctuates, your core reason for entering into the fitness industry will stay constant. Whether you originally wanted to create a large community, help people through health and wellness or introduce the world to your new fitness genre, always keep your original intentions in mind. Challenge yourself to honor your company's

mission statement, and test your growth strategies against these motives constantly. With this type of clarity, you can also manage better, giving your staff and instructors a vision to look up to. When you're true to your brand and true to yourself, you can feel confident about the business you're running.



There you have it – it's community, customer-centricity and good planning that help these successful fitness pros run their businesses. Of course, every business owner develops their own methods for managing and growing their brand, but these lessons help you find the common threads between these unique approaches. No matter what stage you're in, take a step back and ask yourself if these three successful principles play a role in your business.



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