



Izabel Loinaz

As Director of Saint Francis Hospital's renowned Dancemedicine program from 2000 to 2004, Izabel Loinaz developed an innovative and efficient approach to their extensive movement medicine program with a significant focus on patient-specific modifications within the Pilates environment. Doubling the size of the program, Izabel also led the hosting team of the 2004 International Association of Dance Medicine and Sciences conference. Beginning her own Pilates training at St. Francis, Izabel certified at Turning Point Studios with Nora St. John. In 2003 Izabel opened Spring Pilates Studio in San Francisco where, together with business partner Ky Carnell Russell, she directs an ever expanding program.

From the Studio: Beyond the Reformer

by *Izabel Loinaz*

These days the Reformer has almost become synonymous with the word Pilates. It is indeed the both symbol and workhorse of modern Pilates. But there is more to the Pilates method than the Reformer and certainly more to it than just the equipment.

What is beyond the Reformer?

Other larger pieces of equipment developed by Joseph Pilates include the Cadillac (Trapeze Table), Trapeze/Reformer Combination, Chair, Arm Chair, Ladder Barrel, Spine Corrector (or Step Barrel), Mat and Ped-a-Pul. Smaller equipment developed by Pilates by includes the magic circle, foot corrector, neck stretcher, and toe strengthener.

In addition, newly designed Pilates equipment built over the last decade or so, include the Wall Unit, Springboard and Avalon Arm Chair.

Besides equipment there are also "props" like foam rollers, wobble boards, and balls (including one of my favorites, the BOSU). These are not traditional Pilates equipment in the strictest sense, but you would be hard pressed to find a studio without these invaluable items. Instructors love their toys.

Why is the Reformer the workhorse of the Pilates method?

The nature of the Reformer's design and construction provide's it with an unmatched blend of versatility and compactness. Its carriage and frame design provide stability to bring the virtually impossible within reach for many clients. The ropes and pulley system provide multi-directional movement and force.

As trainers, why do we need to look and work beyond the Reformer?

Depending on the client, a Reformer's assets can also be its limitations. Because it is on a track and frame, the client is afforded greater stability and support. However, this same stability and support can diminish the value of instability in an exercise program. Connecting directly to the springs on a Trap Table, for example, provides the client the extra challenge of stabilizing the spring with their movement. Joint stability relies on such challenges to engage the small intrinsic muscles and is paramount to complete joint support.

The track and pulley system of the Reformer is very helpful for clients with joint and pelvic instability and who may have a hard time keeping their movements controlled. However, there are just as many clients who have quite the opposite problem and are limited in their freedom of movement. These clients benefit greatly by the freedom of the Trap Table, Chair, Barrels and small stability equipment. At our studio, these clients will gravitate to the other equipment and sometimes request the whole session off the Reformer. We also have quite a few clients who regularly attend group Reformer classes but schedule additional private sessions just so they can spend their hour on the Trap Table or Chair.

Although the Reformer comes with varying heights I find that – for some rehabilitation clients – the Trap Table is easier to get off and on. The Trap Table is also quite comfortable and it can be used for mat exercises. In addition, the Chair can be utilized for these types of clients.

Why should your facility look beyond the Reformer?

Just to be clear I do want to reiterate that the Reformer is absolutely crucial to your Pilates program. And when building your program it is certainly appropriate to make the Reformer your first big equipment purchase. However, the Reformer is not a complete program. There is a specific and deliberate reason Joseph Pilates developed each piece of equipment. No one piece of equipment is going to address all needs or bodies.

If you are wondering whether expanding your Pilates program or studio is a worthwhile endeavor, here are a few things to consider:

Increased Revenue

Simply put, if you have a full Pilates program that includes the main equipment (Reformer, Trap Table, Chair, and Ladder Barrel), you will be able to charge full market rate for session fees. In turn, if you have all this equipment it should mean that your instructors would need to be fully certified on all of them. This will attract a higher quality of instructors to your program. Higher quality service translates to client loyalty and referrals.

In addition, you can diversify your offerings of group classes by conducting classes on the Chair, Barrel and Springboards. This is a rapidly growing trend that allows studios and gyms to generate additional revenue by offering additional Pilates group classes with a much smaller financial equipment investment.

Further legitimizing your Pilates program

A fitness facility or gym can easily set itself apart from much of the competition with a program that goes beyond the standard mat or Reformer classes. Again, offering Chair, Barrel or Springboard classes would further your competitive edge.

When starting or expanding a Pilates studio, it is crucial to keep in mind that there is quite a bit of competition out there. Just three years ago a potential client's options were limited when looking for a reputable Pilates studio. Now they can go to their neighborhood studio around the corner. However, there is still plenty of room for strong, talented and committed studios. Completing your equipment suite would bring you to that level of competition. This also opens up the possibility of bringing in more instructors and generating more revenue.

How to take that step beyond the Reformer

Start small

If you haven't done so already, start small with stability balls, foam rollers, BOSU and other small apparatus.

Make a commitment to quality staff

Either hire quality instructors who are fully certified, or assist your current instructors in continuing education on the equipment. Make quality – not quantity – a commitment by attracting the best and most experienced instructors possible and offering attractive compensation packages. A strong staff breeds loyalty, both in client and staff retention.



Purchasing equipment

If space is a concern, try a Chair(s) and/or Wall Unit(s). Otherwise, adding a Trap Table (Cadillac) and one or two Chairs gives you room for flexibility with the client and other instructors. If cost is the main concern and you don't have the start-up capital, leasing is a great option. Now that Pilates is on the economic radar, banks are also willing to give loans more than ever before.

Ultimately, if one is passionate and committed to teaching functional movement and has a solid business plan, a Pilates program (whether it be a small room with one Reformer or a large classroom with 10 Chairs) can bring considerable personal and financial reward.

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