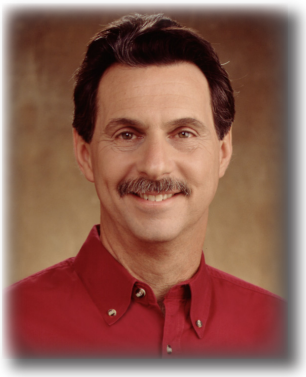
PILATES COREterly
BALANCED BODY® INC. NEWSLETTER

Simple ways to create a proper mind-body atmosphere



Ken Endelman
is Founder and CEO of Balanced Body Inc. Ken began his career as a designer and craftsman of fine custom furniture – a background apparent in every piece of hand-finished equipment the company makes. Since the early 1970s, Ken Endelman has updated Joseph Pilates' equipment with state-of-the-art engineering, materials and technology, many of which have become industry standards. The company has been awarded fifteen U.S. patents, with more pending. Balanced Body Inc. continues to actively promote Pilates to the fitness industry, the medical profession and the media. Ken can be contacted at 800.745.2837, or visit www.pilates.com.

By Ken Endelman, Founder & CEO, Balanced Body Inc.

*As seen in **Personal Fitness Professional Magazine's** e-newsletter*

Several factors contribute to successful and profitable Pilates fitness programs. High-quality equipment, well-educated instructors, targeted marketing and interesting classes are all factors. However, fitness professionals teaching Pilates classes sometimes overlook another element – creating the proper mind-body atmosphere.

Why is atmosphere important?

"The physical, mental and emotional benefits of Pilates are greatly enhanced when your participants can attain an inwardly-directed focus during their workout," says Elizabeth Larkam, Director of Pilates & Beyond for Western Athletic Clubs. "To be able to focus internally on the sensation and connection between the body and exercise, the stimulation of the environment must be subdued. Otherwise the nervous system is going to focus on things like the noise next door, or the light glaring in their eyes."

But creating a serene environment is easier said than done. "Pilates in a fitness facility is challenging. There is so much going on around you," says Stacy Sims, owner of Pendleton Pilates in Cincinnati, OH. "And it's not the kind of exercise where you can mentally check out. It demands constant focus and concentration."

So how can a club create a proper mind-body atmosphere when space and resources are limited? Here are some simple suggestions:

Designated space

Because of the intense focus of Pilates and the range of movements in the exercise, it is important that you designate a room for your Pilates classes. If you have to share it with another exercise class, so be it. (As long as it's not at the same time!) If you can't secure your own space, try to create a sense of containment within the space you have, perhaps by putting up some portable partitions around the session.

Lighting

"Most of Pilates is performed lying on your back," says Sims. "So you have to make sure that bright fluorescent lights aren't shining right in clients' eyes, which will definitely affect their concentration."

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If you have overhead lights, turn half of them off to create a more subdued environment. You might also buy inexpensive floor lamps to use instead of overhead lights. Larkam suggests buying salt lamps (around $35.00 each), which have a warm, soothing glow and emit negative ions that are healthy to breathe.

Temperature

Unlike many fitness classes, for which room temperatures are lowered to avoid overheating, spaces used for Pilates sessions need to be warmer. Room temperature should be set at 70 degrees or higher. Direct airflow vents up, not onto the students. If you use fans, ask your clients if they like air blowing directly on them, and position the fans accordingly. Avoid temperature fluctuations.

Music

Select music that will enhance, not detract from, the environment. "There are lots of mind-body CDs. Look for compositions done by psychoacousticians," says Larkam. Psychoacousticians are skilled in music composition and have studied the effects of sound on the brain. They create music that produces a particular brain wave state, which stimulates cooperation between the two brain hemispheres. This is also known as "hemisync."

Scheduling

Avoid placing mind-body activities adjacent to group exercises like cycling or basketball. If this isn't possible, then use sensitivity when scheduling simultaneous activities in the mind-body and adjacent studios.

Flow

Arrange your Pilates equipment or mats to enhance the flow of traffic through the studio. Leave aprons of floor space around each piece of apparatus to enhance safe passage.

Props

Inexpensive items like foam rollers, balls, mats, discs and bands add a lot of diversity to classes and keep things interesting. If you use props, create an accessible and attractive storage space for them.

Hygiene

Provide towels (which can also be used for head and neck exercises) to help clean the equipment. Use an organic or "green" disinfectant to wipe down the equipment. "At all our sessions, our participants take the time to clean off the equipment for the next group," says Sims. "It really makes a big difference."

Make it friendly

It's the little things that sometimes matter the most. Greet each of your clients personally as they walk in. If you are teaching a group session and have a new member, introduce them to the rest of your group. Put out a bowl of fruit, or bottles of water, for your clients to enjoy.
1.5hatever you implement in your facility, keep in mind that the most important thing is creating a serene atmosphere. Your clients must be able to look forward to putting aside their hectic day-to-day activities for an hour. "It's hard for people to commit to get out and exercise," says Larkam. "When they do make that decision, they should be rewarded with a positive experience."