

# How to Create a State-of-the-Art, Full-Service Pilates Program

By Elizabeth Larkam

A full-service, state-of-the-art Pilates program may evolve over the course of several years. Follow my plan to develop your comprehensive program:

## Finding and educating your instructors

Whether you are a club or studio offering both personal and group sessions, your instructors are the lifeblood of your program. You have two choices when looking to hire an instructor – looking externally or training internal staff. If looking externally, you may want to call a local Pilates training program or your equipment vendor to see if they know of any available instructors in your area.

Here are some suggestions for attracting Pilates instructors to your program: Hold an open house for current and potential clients and invite area Pilates instructors to attend so they can view your facility, take a class and network. Attend industry events such as Pilates on Tour, the PMA's annual conference, or Body Mind Spirit to network with other instructors.

When auditioning a potential instructor there are several things to look for. What is the instructor's educational background? Be wary of instructors who have only taken a "weekend" certification course as it takes more than a few days to be able to teach a Pilates class.

In addition, does the instructor:

- Speak clearly, making it easy for you to understand?
- Demonstrate the movements with grace and control?
- Provide individual corrections, balancing action and explanation?
- Provide hands-on corrections?
- Have group exercise experience?

If you are training existing staff and don't have a training program in place, it is again a good idea to check-in with your local instructor program or your equipment vendor. Many of these educators will actually come on-site to your facility to train. The advantage to educating an in-house instructor is that the employee is familiar with company culture, is loyal to the organization, and is well-positioned with relationships with club members that can help in attracting Pilates clients.

Plan on quarterly continuing education seminars in order to keep your instructors fresh and up to date with the rapidly developing field of Pilates.



**Elizabeth Larkam** —  
A Pilates instructor for 20 years, Elizabeth Larkam is internationally recognized as an innovator of Mind Body movement techniques for fitness, clinical, entertainment, arts and academic settings. Educated in the original Pilates techniques by the Pilates elders, Eve Gentry, Carola Trier, Romana Kryzanowska, Bruce King and Ron Fletcher, Elizabeth was a Dance medicine Pilates specialist at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco. Since 2000 she has been Director of Pilates & Beyond at Western Athletic Clubs. Elizabeth is a presenter at IHRSA, IDEA, Pilates Method Alliance International Conference, Body Mind Spirit, and Pilates On Tour.

## Getting new members started - the Pilates Concierge

Every day I receive calls from our members and the general public saying: 'I've heard so many good things about Pilates. I'm curious and would love to try it, but I'm a little intimidated. What do you offer? How do I get started?'

It is here that having a Pilates "concierge" becomes valuable as they can initially direct a client to the proper Pilates program. The Pilates concierge can be a staff member on-site. It can also be online. At the Western Athletic Clubs we combine web site information with personal service in order to match each client with their optimal Pilates program.

The key information a concierge should collect from an interested client is:

- What are their fitness goals?
- What are the best days and times in their schedule?
- Do they enjoy a small group for camaraderie during exercise?
- Do they prefer private instruction?

Based on these results and discussion about the price of each option, the concierge is then prepared to recommend a Pilates mat class, Allegro reformer small group instruction, or private studio lessons. The concierge explains that prior to joining one of the on-going Allegro groups, clients should take some individual sessions to acquaint themselves with the exercise.

## Pilates Mat Classes

Most students are first introduced to Pilates in mat classes, which can function as feeder programs for the fee-based Allegro groups and studio lessons. Many health clubs now include Pilates mat classes as part of membership benefits. Other centers that charge for classes usually price yoga and Pilates mat classes about the same – approximately \$12.00 to \$15.00 for a single class.

The key to success is a knowledgeable, enthusiastic and compassionate instructor who is skillful in teaching groups with varying levels of ability. Ideally this talented instructor will also teach Allegro group and private studio sessions, enabling them to advise mat class attendees on the advantages of apparatus work.

Mat classes can be difficult for some people. To keep them fun and challenging you can incorporate props such as the foam roller, Pilates resistance ring, rotator discs, thera-band or small ball. Plan to acquire the small props gradually, introducing one piece of equipment about every six months. Once your prop closet is full, there is no end to creativity as your instructors develop new material combining different apparatus to develop core control and balance.

## Small Group Reformer Training and Pilates Studio Circuit

As your members and clients migrate toward Reformer sessions and Pilates Circuit instruction, your instructors should set expectations right up front. Clients or members should be prepared for a strong muscular effort, and your instructors will need to be ready to modify exercises to make it safe and effective for different body types and abilities.

Many of your clients will opt for group classes because they're usually priced much lower than private Pilates sessions. Like personal training, Pilates group equipment sessions are perceived as an amenity, and members are willing to pay for it. Group sessions are normally priced between \$20-40, compared to private sessions, which can run between \$50-100. Many clubs also market Pilates beyond their membership, opening classes to non-members at higher fees.

## **Integrating Pilates programs with group exercises and personal fitness training**

Although it is not necessary, your class may feel more flexible if they do a light cardio workout for about 12 to 15 minutes before class. Have them walk briskly, ride an exercise bike, use the elliptical trainer, or even use the rowing machine. I don't recommend the stair climber because of the emphasis on hip flexion. Some members enjoy a spin class or a group exercise class before their Pilates session. They can sequence their diverse exercise programs either on the same day or on alternate days.

Your class members should plan on one hour of Pilates exercises twice a week in addition to cardio exercise and strength training. Advise them to practice their Pilates prior to their cardio workouts and strength training in order to experience the benefits of improved alignment and core control in their other fitness activities.