

Secrets of a Thriving Adult Dance Fitness Program

Part 4 – The Self-Sustaining Community



While Patricia and I are giggling in the studio, Alissa comes bouncing through the front door, saying, “Oh good! I’m so glad you’re still here – I left my jazz sneakers in the dressing room!” “I saw them back there,” Patricia says as Alissa starts down the hall; then she turns to me and says, “I need to get the right type of shoes for this class.” “Split-sole jazz sneakers are the best for this,” I say.” “Oh great – I got em,” Alissa announces as she pops into the studio where Patricia and I are still lying on the floor.

“Where’d you get your dance sneakers?” Patricia asks Alissa. “I actually got these online,” she says, as I jump up to answer the ringing phone. I come back in a minute or two to find Patricia trying on Alissa’s shoes and deciding those are actually a good size for her as well, so now she knows what to order...

I love these moments. I love watching dancers who are virtual strangers talk to each other as if they have known each other forever. There’s that common bond among dancers, former dancers included, that makes you feel like you are from the same tribe, like you belong together. I pretty much keep quiet, just smiling, as these two talk through how Patricia is going to order her shoes and hope they arrive by next Sunday’s class. “We’ve got class on Tuesday night too,” Alissa says. “It’s an awesome class – you should come to that one too - even if you only have your ballet slippers.” As they talk about the schedule, I watch Alissa working her friendly magic, welcoming Patricia into the group, encouraging her to join us, talking it up and widening our circle. This is part of The Dancer’s Workout® (TDW) secret sauce and why our student attendance has grown so much in recent years. Patricia explains that she lives two hours away, but that she is going to try to come again soon on a Sunday. “Nice to meet you,” Alissa says as she leaves with her dance shoes. “Hope to see you soon!”

“You’ve got some nice dancers,” Patricia says to me when Alissa leaves. “Oh, they’re the best,” I say.

“It would be really nice to hang around adults rather than teenagers,” she says. Patricia teaches an intermediate ballet class to teens and an advanced-beginner ballet class to adults at her studio. She has been trying to figure out how to boost attendance in her adult classes. After trying The Dancer’s Workout® class today and meeting some of my adult dancers from the class, she starts to summarize the various things we talked about before Alissa stopped by. We had been talking about how to build an adult following and how to keep adults coming back to classes. “So Jules, you’re saying that to build attendance in my adult classes, I need to target the right type of adult student and then somehow create a safe zone in my classes. Not sure exactly *how* to do that, but what else?”

“I think one of the most important magical ingredients is that the adult community you are trying to build needs to become self-sustaining. It needs to have a multi-pronged appeal that causes it to become self-sustaining.”

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Page 2

“Ummmm.... Not sure that I know what you mean...” Patricia says. So I explain, “What I mean is that there are many things that factor into whether a busy adult will make time for your classes considering ALL of the other responsibilities she has on her plate. When I gave birth to my twins...”

“What?!? You have twins?”

“Yes! My daughters are 22 now! I have a son too, who is 24! When my son was two and my twins were born, I was pretty overwhelmed; and my mother-in-law gave me some awesome advice... she said that I would need to learn to always do two things at once! And she was right! So I bring this up because adults are BUSY!!! They have to always do multiple things at once! So a dance class can't just be a dance class. It has to be the way they exercise and lose weight, the way they feel joy, the way they meditate and manage stress, the way they connect with others and see their friends, etc. For an adult to prioritize coming to dance class, it has to take care of several things at once. That's what I mean when I say it has to have a “multi-pronged” appeal. And it has to be SO GOOD at each one of these things that it becomes self-sustaining...” Patricia seemed interested, so I continued, “The community aspect of it is HUGE. My dancers have to feel that this class is their sanctuary, where they can come to re-set and to feel safe and to have friends who are interested in them. Someone like Alissa, who is so loving and wonderful, makes you feel like you have a friend! And when you come to class and see Alissa, you are dancing and staying in shape; and you are also feeling the joy of friendship. The Dancer's Workout® classes are filled with women who are loving and fun, like Alissa. When my dancers come to class, they are taking care of their emotional, social, spiritual, and physical needs, all at once! The students in the room connect with each other, independent of me, and that causes the community to become self-sustaining.”

She nods. “I hear you. I understand what you are saying. And it sounds real good; but I feel like you are telling me what I need to create, not how to do it. I'm not sure I would know how to create that.”

“Honestly, it's taken me 8 years to figure it out. We have over 250 adult students and all of my classes are now really well attended, so I feel like I have finally gotten it right. So you know what we did? We created a course for dance studio owners and dance instructors who want to learn how to do it themselves. The course also certifies dancers to teach The Dancer's Workout® because the actual class is a big part of it as well.”

“Wow! How long is the course?” “Well, we had in-person workshops this past year which were awesome, and then we created an online course so that learning the entire TDW secret sauce and becoming a TDW-Certified Instructor can be done online as a self-paced course. With the course, dancers can now get certified to teach The Dancer's Workout® and learn to build their own followings of adult dancers in as little as six weeks. Or they can spread it out. It's completely self-paced. We also provide all the choreography for the TDW classes.”

“I want to do it! Is it for dance instructors or dance studio owners?” she asks. “We are marketing it to dance studio owners who want to sponsor a dancer in their studio to become certified to teach The Dancer's Workout® AND to independent instructors who want to become certified and build their own adult followings. You can do it if you want!”



Patricia seems genuinely excited. “This might be exactly what I need! I would love to learn how to build a community of adult dancers.”

“Yeah, we'll teach you how to become the GO-TO studio for adults in your hometown!”

For more information about Jules and The Dancer's Workout®, visit <http://www.thedancersworkout.com>

Jules Szabo is a UNC School of the Arts classical ballet graduate
Click [here](#) for her featured story on the UNCSCA website!