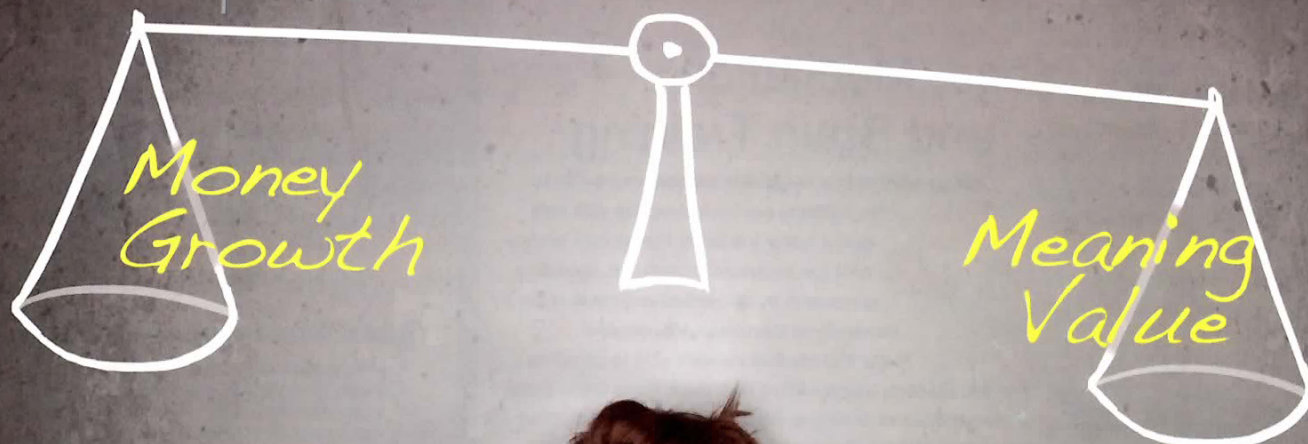




Building a Conscious, Thriving and Sustainable Business

Seven tenets to help independent contractors stay true to their deepest values while making a good living.

Have you noticed that these days, more of the business world is crossing over to the conscious or spiritual way of doing business? Terms like *karma capitalism*, *spiritual marketing*, *environmentally friendly*, *sharing economy* and *community-based buying* are all cropping up in the mainstream corporate lexicon. As forward-thinking businesses start to embrace the conscious way of doing business—and make steep profits in the process—are you honing the necessary skills to join their ranks?

The businesses we most admire aren't the ones that are fixated on having the coolest websites or the best social media numbers; they are the ones that care about the good of humanity and the planet. Caring on its own, though, isn't enough. Sometimes, businesses with "good intentions" go broke.

Conscious business is a synergy between capitalism and spirituality, growth and value, money and meaning. For many fitness and wellness professionals, it is about providing a service that aligns with their deepest values, or higher self, while meeting their own survival needs.

So how can you build a conscious business and make a good living?

Finding Fulfillment in Business

Launching a successful career in fitness or wellness isn't as straightforward as getting a certificate from a reputable organization. To be deeply, truly fulfilled, you must be able to grow and contribute beyond yourself. Conscious business practices begin with sharing your passion, values and expertise through your work and creating a flourishing and via-

ble environment for your clients, your vendors, your staff and yourself.

Let's explore seven tenets that can help you expand the consciousness of your business.

TENET 1: GET REAL

Jessica Matthews, MS, senior health & fitness expert for the American Council on Exercise, says, "I have learned over the years that people connect best with *real* people, and I've seen that as I've learned to embrace all of the facets of my life and experiences that make me who I am, people are really able to resonate with what I do and what I offer."

Being "authentically you" may not feel as though it has a place in business, but here's the thing: As an independent contractor, you *are in business*—in fact, you *are* your business!—and if you

aspire to live an authentic, meaningful life, you can't leave that aspiration at the door when you arrive at work.

With regard to your career, ask yourself these questions (and others like them):

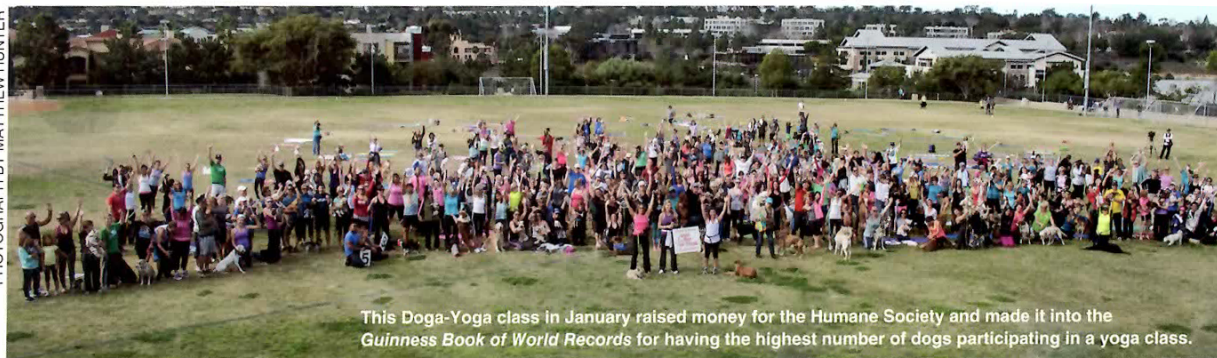
- What is my true passion?
- What are my core strengths?
- Is teaching what I really love to do? (Really?) (Love?)
- If my true passion is teaching, is that what I'm really great at, too?
- If I'm really good at teaching, how can I do that and make good money?

For example, Dawn Celapino of Leash Your Fitness™, in San Diego, has participants work out with their dogs—but she doesn't stop at offering sessions in local parks. She takes going mobile a step further by leading social outings like kayaking, camping trips and hiking. Yes, the dogs participate in all outings!

"This is all part of my 'work,'" says Celapino, "but it doesn't feel like work because it is fun and helps build community, which in return retains clients."

Often, your best marketing happens when people experience *you* doing what you love, in your dharma. Fitness is a very hands-on, high-touch industry. That's part of why people love it. So don't depend only on "low-touch" marketing efforts like ads, fliers or mass mail-outs. Typically this is not what people want. Sure, ads and such might get you a few clients here and there, but don't you want to build a full, thriving practice of returning, referring students? Low-touch efforts won't cut it. You must know how to talk about who you are and

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW HUNTER



This Doga-Yoga class in January raised money for the Humane Society and made it into the Guinness Book of World Records for having the highest number of dogs participating in a yoga class.

TENET 2: SEE WHAT YOU DO AS BOTH A LIFESTYLE AND A BUSINESS

What you do is a lifestyle because

- it has to be at the core of who you are;
- this is not a "leave it at the office" job; and
- you have to live your fitness, and love it!

It's a business because

- you do, in fact, own your own business, and recognizing this is part of getting real; and
- making money doing what you do is okay (and indeed, essential); this includes asking for it and charging fees that allow you to make a profit.

Just as you must remain a true student to your education in your niche, you must remain a true student to your business. Like best friends, they go hand in hand.

TENET 3: BE MOBILE

Fitness and yoga have already moved beyond traditional venues into schools, corporate offices and hospitals. There are endless possibilities for taking your specialty practically anywhere.

TENET 4: KNOW HOW TO PROMOTE YOURSELF

What do you think about when you hear the word "marketing"?

If you cringe when you think about promoting yourself or marketing your services, you may have to do some inner work on reframing your language around this subject. Try using "educating, spreading the word, creating community, informing people about an opportunity."

what you do in a way that resonates with prospective clients.

While word-of-mouth referrals are invaluable, it's also important to embrace technology to grow your business. A high priority should be making it easy and convenient for potential clients to find out about you and how to connect with you. The Internet gives *you* the power to share your message and connect to your ideal clientele. >>

CHECK IN BEFORE MOVING AHEAD

Taking inventory of all aspects of your lifestyle—business, finance, personal relationships, contribution and legacy—is key to being authentically you and creating a sustainable, thriving career.

Ask yourself if your life is in balance, and if it isn't, identify what you are neglecting. Is stress in one area spilling over into others? If you're stressed out about the commercial side of your fitness business, your personal life will suffer too. Just as nothing else matters when your health is compromised, financial struggle affects everything else in your life, including your health, relationships and quality of experience.

Take stock before moving forward. Before you can progress in your career, you have to recognize where you are now and where you want to go from there.

- Do you want to make a bigger difference with more ease?
- Do you want to apply a business and marketing paradigm that is based on mutuality and abundance?
- Do you want your deepest expression of appreciation to be reflected in a conscious exchange of value? (The exchange then becomes a sacred act.)



Yoga for Hope brings together hundreds of yogis in a community-building event that funds medical research and treatment.

Make sure you start the “inner work” of knowing—and, if necessary, improving—your relationship to self-promotion before launching any new campaign to attract more students or clients.

TENET 5: GIVE BACK

Give back to your community and it will come back to you in spades. Get creative with this and have fun!

Dennis Dean, owner of Yoga Mandiram LLC in Cardiff, California, offers a complimentary Full Moon Meditation Hike each month. “It’s an opportunity to educate [others] about our connection to the planet and ourselves, while building community.” After the hike, Dean offers participants a guest pass with an information package about his studio, resulting in an increase in class attendance and retention.

A highlight of my year, as a yoga instructor, is volunteering and teaching a variety of donation classes for Yoga for Hope, a fundraiser for City of Hope, which is a medical treatment and research facility that focuses on life-threatening illnesses including cancer, diabetes and HIV/AIDS. Each year, Yoga for Hope culminates in a team-taught featured event that attracts hundreds of participants; raises money for meaningful, high-impact causes; and unites yogis, sponsors and studios.

How creative can you get? I recently cotaught a Doga-Yoga class for over 250 “dogis” and their yogis to raise awareness and funds for the Humane Society.

Cosponsored by San Diego’s Leash Your Fitness, the event gained local and national press because we documented it around the stringent rules of the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

TENET 6: GREEN YOUR FITNESS

Exploring a conscious path in business is part of embracing a conscious path in all aspects of your life. This is part and parcel of “getting real,” as we discussed in Tenet #2. And more and more these days, environmental stewardship is one aspect of being on this path.

Consider your mission and whether it takes into account the health of others and the planet. Keeping your core values front and center will guide you in your decisions. For example, when choosing vendors, do you consider their business practices? You can make a difference by supporting like-minded professionals who are committed to the well-being of others and the planet.

Eight years ago, yoga teacher Aubrey Hackman of Del Mar, California, became frustrated after attending several yoga conferences and seeing the amount of waste produced by the events. She decided to do something about it. As founder of the Telluride Yoga Festival, she organized the first ecofriendly yoga festival with a zero-waste goal. The festival became the catalyst for future yoga festivals to become good environmental stewards.

“I used a local and staunch environmental NPO [nonprofit organization] to write out our guidelines for our ven-

dors and sponsors to follow, and then donated 25% of net profits back to that NPO,” says Hackman. “Though it did turn quite a few sponsors away that had chosen to package their samples in environmentally un-kind options, it attracted . . . some of the country’s most respected teachers.”

Of course, always look to your own practices first. What steps are you taking to minimize waste and use resources wisely? Making even small improvements, like changing light bulbs and recycling as much as possible, can help.

TENET 7: CONNECT AND THRIVE

“Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.” —*Japanese poet Ryunosuke Satoro*

You have a choice: Compete and survive, or Connect and thrive.

As you develop more conscious business practices, you will want to emphasize collaboration—with the industry, its leaders and your peers. Consider joint ventures, guest blogging, events, webinars and seminars consistent with your niche. Affiliations with industry experts add greater depth to what you are providing.

Most fitness and wellness professionals live and work with a global vision of healing or transformative intent. Marketing yourself authentically merely magnifies and refines this. *You can be you and succeed.* Reach for what is highest in you.

Becoming more conscious generates value based on a win-win-win concept: creating benefit for others, for our self and for the world. Be authentically yourself, and start building a conscious, sustainable and thriving business. ■

Stacy McCarthy, E-RYT 500, is a wellness expert, mentor, author and producer. Since teaching her first class in 1984, she has taught thousands of students and certified hundreds of teachers. Visit her at www.YogaNamastacy.com or access her online classes on www.SpiroFIT.com.