

Put Me In, Coach!

Part 2

By Karen Thickstun, NCTM

Running a business takes a village. Your village might already include a tax accountant, attorney and website designer. Consider adding a business coach if you are unable to see a clear path forward, need accountability, feel overwhelmed or simply want to develop new skills. “Even superheroes don’t do it alone. Everyone needs collaboration and advice to conquer the world.” (Sahai, 2017)

In the previous column (April/May 2022), we met Jennifer, who felt stuck with how to manage and grow her multi-teacher studio, and Laura, who needed clarity for a major career transition. Let’s meet Natalie, Auksuole and Alyssa—each expanded her village to include a business coach.

Building a Village

After graduation, Natalie Doughty built a mobile studio clientele, driving 80 miles daily. After two years at full capacity, she found a commercial rental space that she loved. Given the large financial investment, Natalie sought a business coach to assist with the transition and credits Andrea Miller (www.musicstudiostartup.com) with helping her to take that leap as well as:

- develop a website that speaks authentically to her ideal client
- find a graphic designer to create a unique visual brand for her studio
- build a budget and financial system that she can understand and manage, while making strategic investments in the business
- learn how to operate her business based on *her* values

Natalie followed Andrea’s guidance to create a business plan, looking at liabilities and assets to identify decisions that would be sustainable long term. “I had all those dreams and plans in my heart, but needed Andrea’s practical knowledge and perspective of ‘how are you actually going to do that?’” Andrea shares that a client doesn’t always know what the core problem is.

“They might assume they just need more students, so they seek help with marketing. Sometimes marketing is the problem, but often it’s a more foundational issue, like a financial model that doesn’t work, that needs to be addressed.”



Andrea offers various coaching formats to fit her clients' needs—1:1 coaching, group coaching and “as-needed” sessions. Her *Music Studio Startup* podcast includes many relevant episodes.

Never Too Late

After teaching for 20 years, Auksuole Jackunaite reevaluated her teaching philosophy and restructured her entire studio to an online format. Endless questions took her in different directions until she gained clarity through business coaching. Auksuole initially discovered inspiration mixed with practical tips on Andrea Miller's podcast. She then pursued individual coaching as well as a group Mastermind program, where she worked with other colleagues for valuable feedback and support. This allowed her to create her first self-paced creativity package for piano students. She advises, “getting the right support in areas we need can help us not just grow our studio but also free up some time and energy to concentrate on activities we value and enjoy the most.”

A Full-Time Career

When the opportunity arose for Alyssa Haffner to purchase an existing studio, she felt more guidance was required than what her attorney and CPA could provide. To reach her goal of creating a successful full-time career instead of a part-time studio, she engaged business coach Shane Nicolas (www.thestudiochallenge.com). She learned the intricacies of web design, social media algorithms and marketing as well as the importance of having systems in place, how/when to automate or delegate and strategies for eliminating pain points and decision fatigue.

Decision fatigue became an issue as Alyssa faced the largest studio she had ever worked with, including its many business aspects. Between deciding what/when to post to social media, planning for classes and restructuring to group classes only, she reached a point of

paralysis. With her coach and a small peer group, she developed strategies to conquer decision fatigue. She automated the enrollment process, scheduled social media posts on a pre-set guideline, created a proprietary level system to track student growth to facilitate class planning, utilized meal prep strategies and created a teaching “uniform.”

Finding a Business Coach

If you have ever advised a parent on how to find a great piano teacher, you already know how to find a great business coach. Ask trusted sources for referrals. Seek someone with expertise in the area you most need help with, such as marketing, finance or start-up strategies. Interview the prospective coach. Reputable coaches offer online blogs, webinars and/or a free session so you can experience what it is like to work with them. Does it feel like a good fit—expertise as well as personality?

Business coaches challenge, inspire and support teachers, just as teachers do for their students. It's a winning strategy!

Reference

Sahai, Kavita. 2017. “Five Signs You Need a Business Coach.” *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/06/30/five-signs-you-need-a-business-coach/?sh=1e0e86845c88>. Accessed May 31, 2022.

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