

10 Commandments of Running a Dance Studio

- I. Success Has Little to Do With Dance
- II. You Need a Strong Team
- III. Know How to Manage Customer Problems
- IV. Get Comfortable With Uncertainty
- V. Know Your Niche
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Running a dance studio can sound like a dream come true to a veteran dancer. But a year into your business, you might be surprised to see how little time you spend dancing, and how much of your efforts are dedicated to decidedly uncreative pursuits like accounting and compliance with legal regulations.

That doesn't mean you can't have fun. But before the fun starts, you need to get your studio -- and your life -- under control. Studio management software through The Studio Director can help you do precisely that. In conjunction with these 10 commandments for running a studio, the right software arms you with everything you need to succeed.



1. Success Has Little to Do With Dance

You might be a great dancer, a brilliant instructor, or both. Yet your studio's success actually has very little to do with your dance skills. There are thousands of great dancers out there, and thousand more great instructors. They won't all succeed. Success in business demands business acumen and quite a bit of luck. That doesn't mean your dance knowledge is irrelevant. It's just not enough on its own. To succeed, you'll also need:

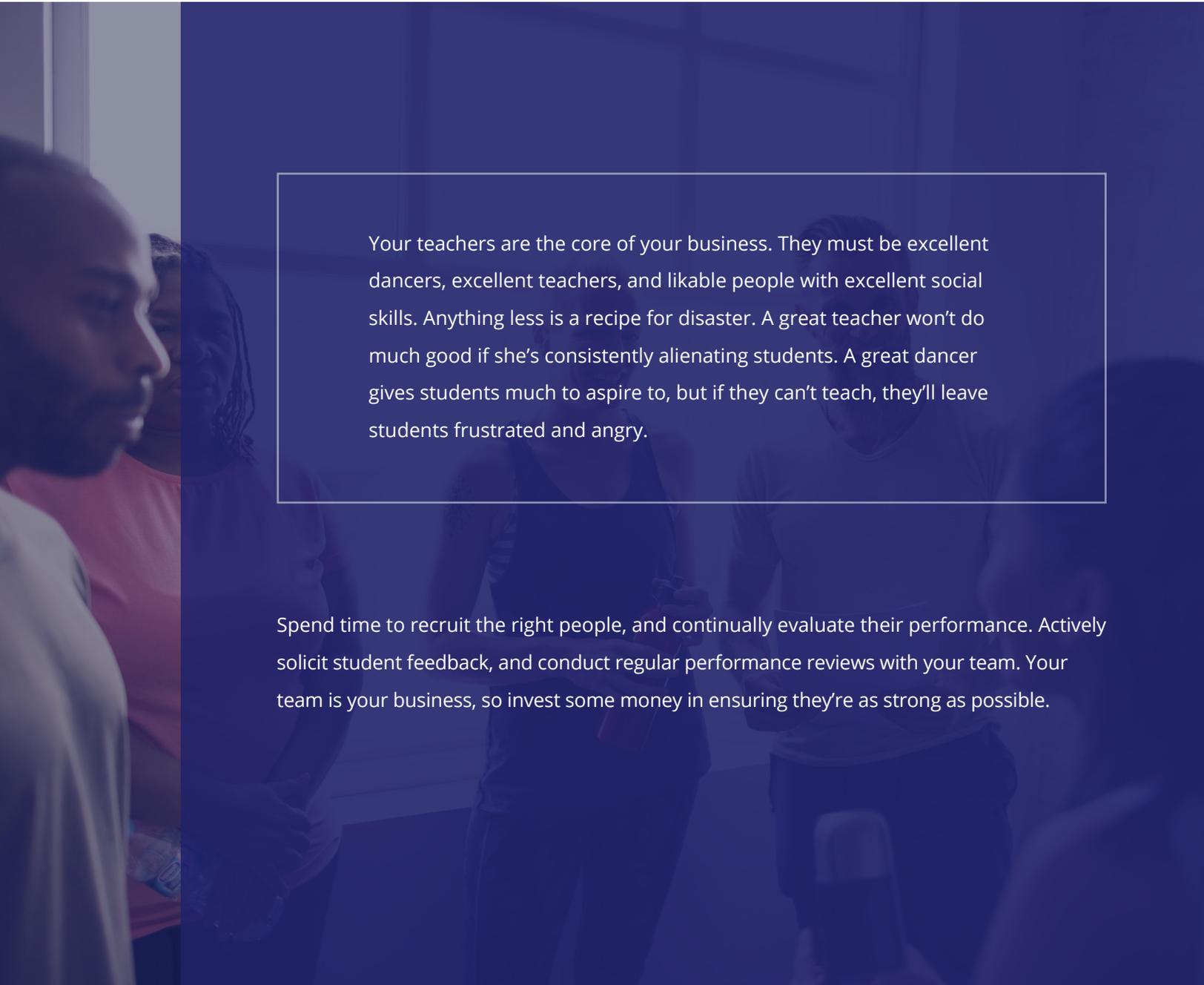
- Obsessive attention to your financial bottom line.
- A marketing strategy that works.
- A customer retention strategy that helps you meet your financial goals.
- Knowledge of the regulatory climate in your area, and a plan for dealing with unexpected changes, such as new zoning restrictions.
- Insurance to cover the unexpected disasters that are an inevitable part of doing business.

Succeeding as a business owner also means knowing enough to know what you don't know. It's foolish, for example, to try to represent yourself in a legal matter. If the matter seems simple, that's strong evidence that you don't understand it. The same is true of other specialized pursuits, such as accounting, insurance, and marketing.

Don't try to do it all yourself. The inevitable result will be sub-par results. Hiring experts may demand a little more money, but this investment ultimately saves you time, money, and lots of hassle.

||. You Need a Strong Team

Paying instructors, a front desk staff, and other members of your team is expensive. But you know what's more expensive? Dealing with a mess created by staff who don't know what they're doing. Your front desk staff will make or break your business. If they're rude to students, you might never know it. You'll just know that people aren't signing up for classes, and it could take months to find out why -- and it could take years to recover from the damage!



Your teachers are the core of your business. They must be excellent dancers, excellent teachers, and likable people with excellent social skills. Anything less is a recipe for disaster. A great teacher won't do much good if she's consistently alienating students. A great dancer gives students much to aspire to, but if they can't teach, they'll leave students frustrated and angry.

Spend time to recruit the right people, and continually evaluate their performance. Actively solicit student feedback, and conduct regular performance reviews with your team. Your team is your business, so invest some money in ensuring they're as strong as possible.

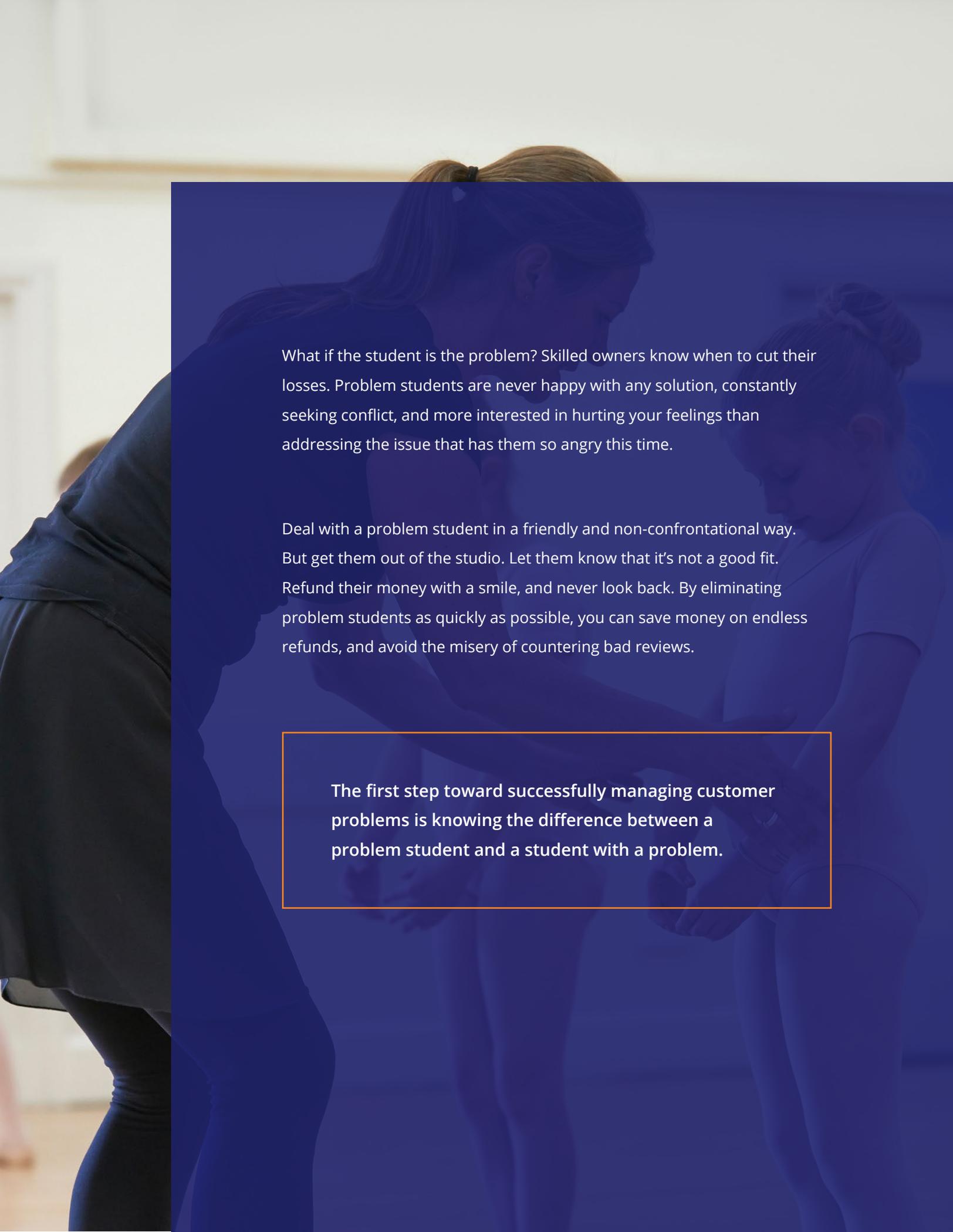


Know How to Manage Customer Problems

The first step toward successfully managing customer problems is knowing the difference between a problem student and a student with a problem.

The most successful studio owners begin every interaction with an unhappy student by assuming that student is a student with a problem -- not that the student is the problem.

Why? Because this approach puts you in problem-solving mode. When you're interested in solving problems, you're better prepared to deal with unhappy students, devise amicable solutions, and improve your reputation. Treating a student with a legitimate complaint as a problem student, however, is a recipe for reputation destruction. Angry students can and will tell others. Address the problem, and they'll tell others what a great job you did turning a complaint into a compliment.

A woman in a black leotard is adjusting the hair of a young girl in a white leotard. They are in a dance studio, with a wooden floor and a white wall in the background. The woman is leaning over the girl, and the girl is looking down. The scene is captured in a soft, natural light.

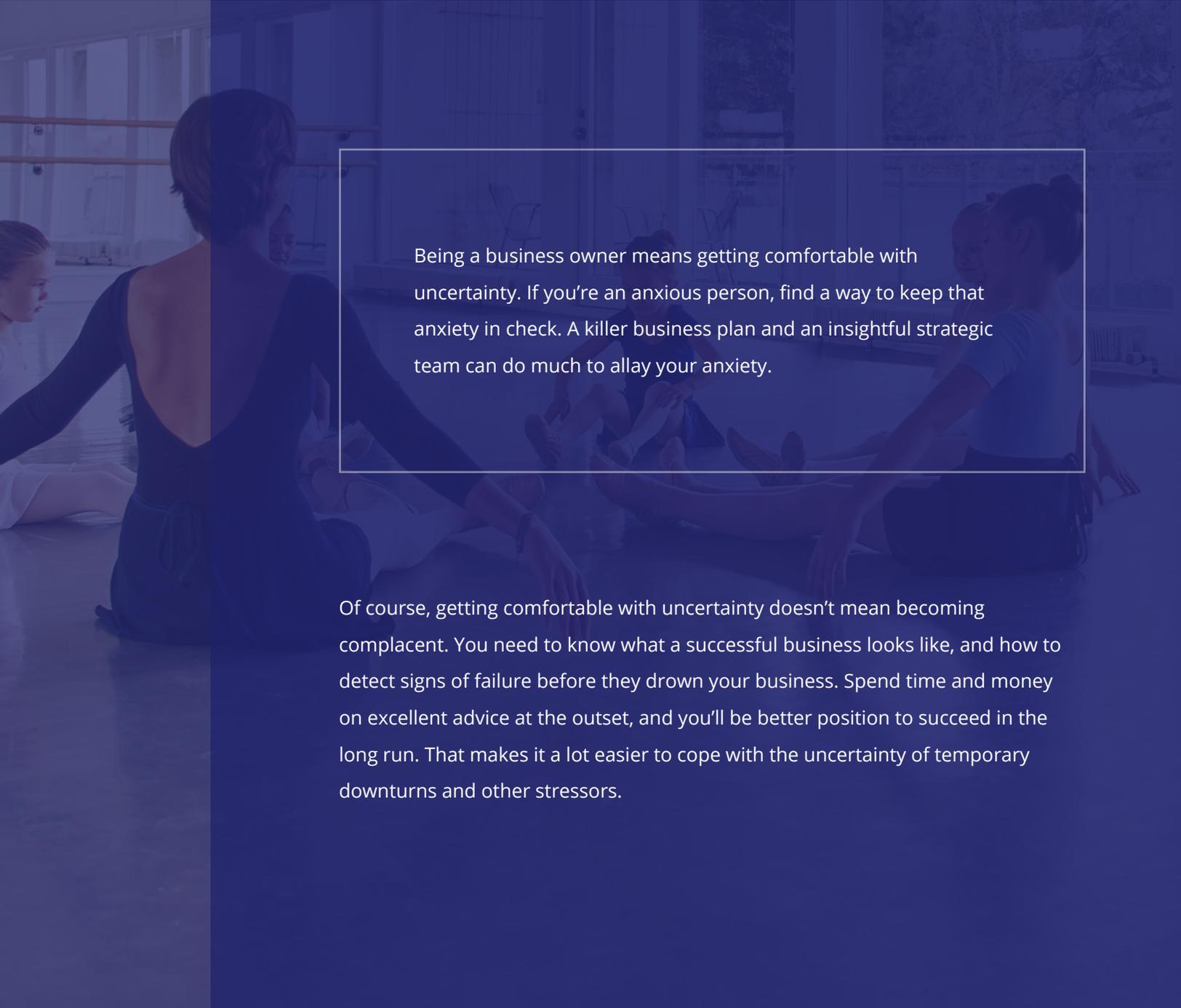
What if the student is the problem? Skilled owners know when to cut their losses. Problem students are never happy with any solution, constantly seeking conflict, and more interested in hurting your feelings than addressing the issue that has them so angry this time.

Deal with a problem student in a friendly and non-confrontational way. But get them out of the studio. Let them know that it's not a good fit. Refund their money with a smile, and never look back. By eliminating problem students as quickly as possible, you can save money on endless refunds, and avoid the misery of countering bad reviews.

The first step toward successfully managing customer problems is knowing the difference between a problem student and a student with a problem.

IV. Get Comfortable With Uncertainty

Running a business, no matter how successful you are, will never offer the certainty of a steady paycheck. Sure, you might make more than enough to pay the bills. You'll also never know if next week's profits will exceed this week's.

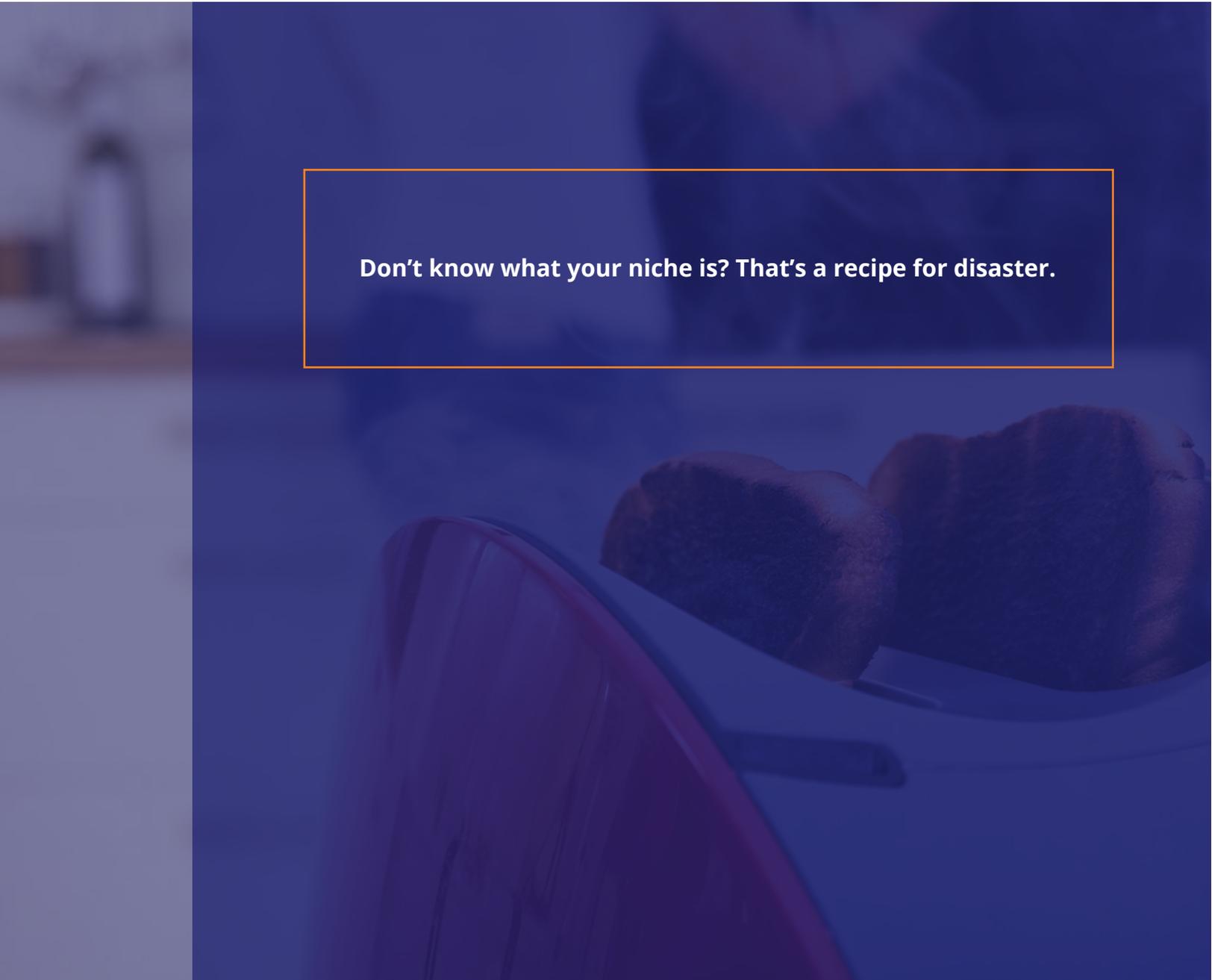


Being a business owner means getting comfortable with uncertainty. If you're an anxious person, find a way to keep that anxiety in check. A killer business plan and an insightful strategic team can do much to allay your anxiety.

Of course, getting comfortable with uncertainty doesn't mean becoming complacent. You need to know what a successful business looks like, and how to detect signs of failure before they drown your business. Spend time and money on excellent advice at the outset, and you'll be better position to succeed in the long run. That makes it a lot easier to cope with the uncertainty of temporary downturns and other stressors.

V. Know Your Niche

No studio can cater to all aspiring dancers. What do dancers in your niche want? You must give it to them. Don't know what your niche is? That's a recipe for disaster. Find an opening in the market that no one else is filling, and address that market share's needs. When you're the only one competently addressing the needs of a market segment, you essentially have a monopoly. That's a surefire bet for success.



Don't know what your niche is? That's a recipe for disaster.

VI. Offer Something Unique

What does your business offer that no one else does? That's your recipe for success. If you're doing the same thing everyone else does, then you're entirely dependent on luck. Luck is not a great partner for the long haul success of your studio. What you need is a plan. And a plan requires that you offer your students something no one else can.

So what do you offer? Excellent instruction? A specific style of dance? A famous instructor? A competitive program? A program that feeds into other dance schools? Instructors with an extensive knowledge of physiology? Whatever it is, you need to own it -- and hone it. That means continually sharpening your focus on that which you do better than anyone else.

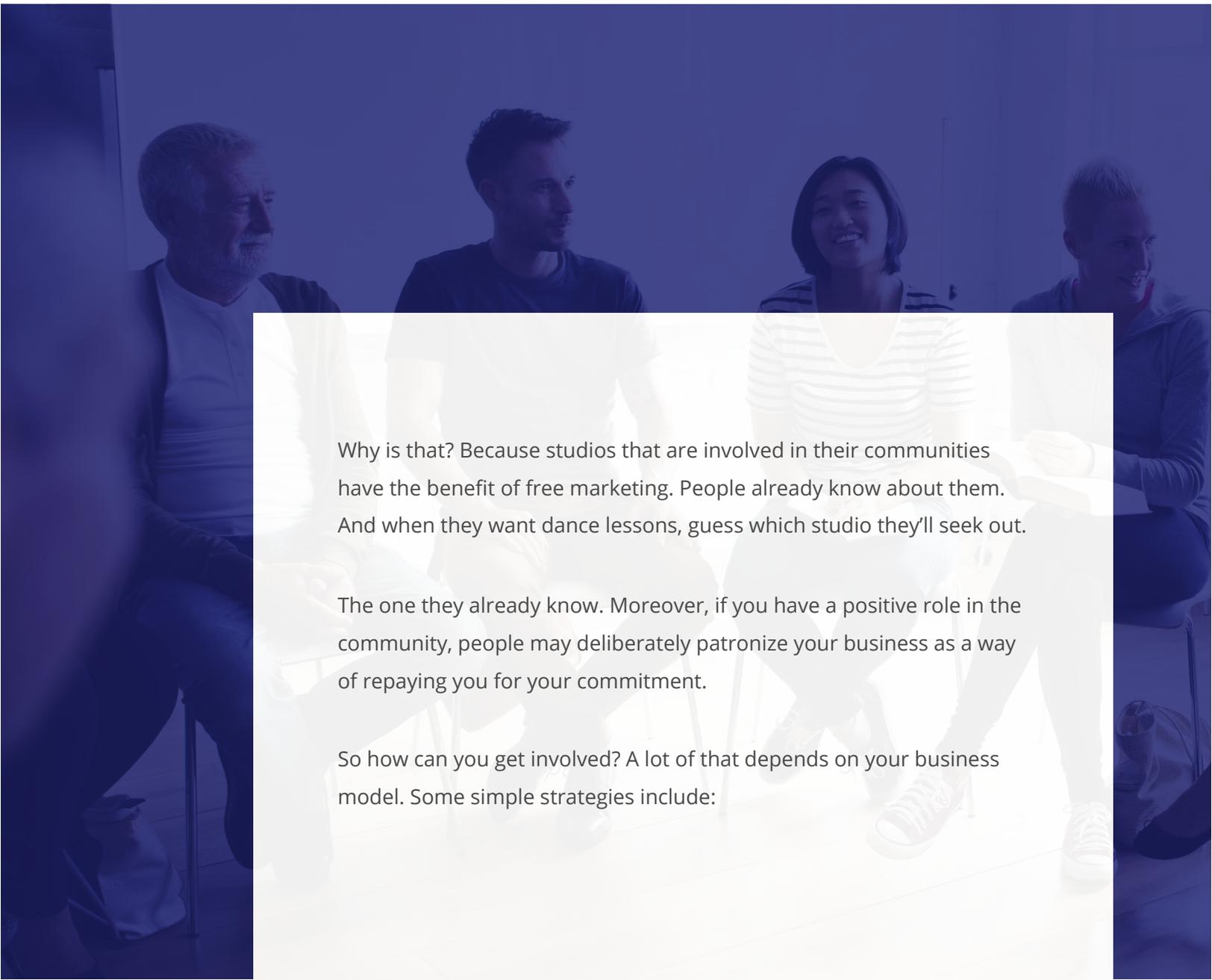
What does your business offer that no one else does? That's your recipe for success

It's not enough to offer something unique, though. To truly capitalize on the value of your uniqueness, you need to educate your customers about it. Do your students know how skilled their instructors are? Do they understand that you're offering a form of dance no one else does? If not, now's the time to change that.

Your community must also know what you provide. Join organizations related to your unique offerings. Market to the community with a focus not on general dance, but on the specific niche you're filling. Help students and would-be students see the value you provide.

VII. Get Involved in Your Community

A dance studio is more than just a business. It's an important part of the community. The most successful dance studios are well-known and much-beloved even to people who have never taken a class. Community involvement is an investment in the long-term success of your business -- even if it costs you more money than it brings in at first.



Why is that? Because studios that are involved in their communities have the benefit of free marketing. People already know about them. And when they want dance lessons, guess which studio they'll seek out.

The one they already know. Moreover, if you have a positive role in the community, people may deliberately patronize your business as a way of repaying you for your commitment.

So how can you get involved? A lot of that depends on your business model. Some simple strategies include:

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- A group of people in a dance studio, with a semi-transparent text box overlaid on the image. The background shows several people in motion, some with their arms raised, suggesting a dance or fitness class. The text box is white with a light blue shadow and contains a list of seven bullet points.
- Offering charitable projects, such as an annual free dance day.
 - Sponsoring local events, particularly charitable projects.
 - Renting booths or tents at local fairs.
 - Offering your expertise outside the walls of the studio. For example, you might provide a free online dance Q&A, or call into a local radio show.
 - Using your studio for charitable causes. For example, you might donate 10% of the profits from a specific class to a domestic violence shelter, then heavily market this endeavor.
 - Offering the use of your studio to charitable undertakings for free, or at substantially reduced rent.

VIII. Get Specific About Money

Almost every studio owner has stayed up late at night worrying about money -- where it's going, how you're making it, whether you have enough, whether you're using what you have wisely.

Ultimately, it's money that makes or breaks studios. Very few studios go out of business for reasons that aren't financial. So paying diligent attention to financial matters may feel stressful, but the stress is a worthwhile investment.

How do you do that? Unless you're a finance expert yourself, you need a financial expert. Meet with a financial advisor before you do anything else, and continue regular meetings with your finance advisor for the life of your business. You should know:

- How much you need to make to pay your bills.
- How much you can afford to lose before your business must close.
- How much you need to make to be profitable.
- How you can minimize expenses.
- How much you'll need to save for taxes.
- How much insurance and other vital services cost.

When you only know that you need money, it's easy to panic. After all, without clear numbers, nothing will ever feel like enough. With specific figures, however, you know how close you are to your goals. You might be closer than you think.

IX. Track Marketing Results

Every business needs a marketing strategy. It's not enough, though, to send a bunch of marketing materials out into the world and just hope for the best. If you do that, you might as well light your money on fire.

Some marketing efforts will inevitably be more fruitful than others. Some may cost more than they bring in. How can you tell the difference? You need to track your marketing results. That means developing a clear marketing plan, then looking at how it affects new business. How does your business change over time? Who responds best to which marketing strategies? Can you answer these questions? If not, you need a marketing team who can help you respond to these simple queries.

You need to track your marketing results.

X. Streamline as Much as You Can

Are you feeling overwhelmed already? That's a good sign. It means you're taking the demands of running a business seriously. Running a business does not have to run your life, though. You need to streamline as many processes as you can. That means outsourcing to competent people, and where possible, automating the basics.

That's where The Studio Director comes in. Acting as your silent partner, we manage your finances, track marketing results, provide student feedback, manage inventory, and much, much more. You could pay a small army to do it all for you. Or you could invest a few dollars in The Studio Director. Our cloud-based software ensures you're always armed with information you need, and that you never again have to call a team member in the middle of the night to crunch numbers, get student information, or plan for a meeting. We help managers and owners do it all. After all, no one can really do it all.



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