

## Petra Kolber gives down-to-earth advice about the group fitness instructor career path.

Petra Kolber, the 2001 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year, is best known for her creativity and commonsense approach to teaching. As a cancer survivor, she knows firsthand how therapeutic exercise can be, and she strives to share her passion with as many people as possible. “Every day is a gift,” Kolber says. “Life is an unexpected road of miracles and surprises. Let’s be in the best health we can be in, so we are ready for whatever life decides to throw at us.”

### What is your favorite music mix? Why?

If I’m struggling for choreography or need a boost in my own workouts, I’ll go into West Hollywood and buy remixes of popular songs. They are just amazing and add a whole new element to my classes.

### What sources do you tap for new ideas?

Many times I’ll take a class at a dance studio instead of a gym. This gives me a lot of new ideas and helps me think outside the box. I’ll also watch music videos and even cheerleading competitions (great source for arm combinations).

I take a variety of yoga and tai chi classes when I need mind-body ideas. I also watch videos and DVDs to see what’s new and what’s already been done. I’m a big believer that nothing is really “new”; however, there are many creative and exciting ways you can add your own personality and voice. Some of my biggest inspiration comes from other fitness presenters. I’ll often pop my head into a session (although never before I present, because I start second-guessing

myself). Sure enough, just when I think I’ve done everything there is to do, I see a move that makes me say, “Wow, I never thought of that.” It totally inspires me to go back into the studio and create.

### How do you teach to a multilevel class?

Layering! Anyone who has been in my workshops knows I’m a huge fan of taking the movement in its most basic form and layering one option on top of another. It’s a great way to include all fitness levels in one class. It also lets every participant feel successful.

I make it a point to teach to *every* person in the room. I used to be obsessed with everyone moving together. I don’t care about that anymore, and I mean that in a good way. As long as class participants are having a good time, I’m happy.

### What was the smartest thing you did to grow your career?

I followed my intuition and my heart. There have been several crossroads throughout my career. In most instances I could have taken the easy (or even more lucrative) way. Instead I stayed true to myself. I am very proud that I’ve always made choices based on integrity. While they may not have made sense to others at the time, in the long run those choices ended up pushing me farther ahead.

My mum always said that you have to be able to look at yourself in the mirror every morning. I’m proud to say that I can do that (although I have many bad hair days).

You also need to keep your eye on the big picture. Don’t get caught up in small details. For example, I created a signature class in 1993 called “London Beat,” a step class that featured four live drummers. It was an amazing experience. If you looked at it from a “small picture” point of view, it was a bad idea because I lost money every time I taught it. However, it garnered a lot of press, put me in touch

with Reebok, opened the door to several conventions and moved me out of the studio and onto the stage.

### Who is your most inspiring class participant?

I am inspired by anyone who is new and just gives it a go. I love it when the person in the back struggling with a grapevine “gets it” halfway through class.

### How do you avoid injuries?

Yoga, yoga and more yoga, plus a good pair of shoes. The older I get and especially with all the flying I do, if I haven’t been practicing regularly my body feels it immediately. I try to stretch, but like most people I never do as much as I should. A solid yoga class helps realign my body and also takes care of my tight calves and Achilles tendons.

### What advice do you have for beginning instructors?

Try not to get hung up on choreography and complexity. Have fun and don’t try to be perfect. Not everyone is going to love what you do, but as long as you teach from your heart and give 100 percent, you’ll make a huge difference. Remember, people aren’t paying to see your bad day—they’re trying to forget about theirs. Inspire, motivate and help others reach their potentials by becoming more active.

Also, if you find a class you like, take it as often as you can. Analyze what you like, what works and what doesn’t, and then utilize those elements in your own class. Stay up-to-date and inspired by watching new videos and attending conventions and workshops.

Never teach 7 days a week! Even if it’s a stretch class, you still have to be “on.” Take at least 1 day off a week to help avoid burnout.

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