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There's Something To Be Said About Small

Ellen C. Wells



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A new yoga studio just opened up not more than a 10-minute walk from me. Perfect! And I happen to teach a class or two there each week. Even better! Of course I'm encouraging my neighbors and friends to visit the new studio. They ask how much the studio charges. The rates and promotions in Boston vary, but it's typical to have a "30 days for \$30" offer for new students, or even a "first class is free" promo to lure folks into the studio. After that classes are offered as drop-ins (\$16), as class packs (e.g. 10 classes for \$140) or as unlimited monthly (\$110-\$140) and yearly (\$1,000-\$1,200) passes.

This new studio, however, isn't going the typical promo route. Situated as sole bottom retail vendor in an all-new luxury condo building, they are offering a month-long new-student special for \$50, a drop-in rate of \$18 and \$150 for a month-long unlimited pass. I thought the studio's pricing structure was a

pretty gutsy move, being a new studio and all. Set the bar high and adjust from there if need be. I can dig that.

Just this morning I was reading a recent blog post from New Yorker J Brown that gives a little insight into this studio owner's strategy and, ultimately, goal for the studio and its students. The title of J's post is "The Future of Yoga is Small," and his premise is that the more you try to fill your studios by offering new-student and Groupon deals, the less likely those yogis will take classes with you for the non-deal price. He writes, "If the normal cost of a month-unlimited card is \$135 or more, and you give new students the opportunity to get the same thing for \$30, the chances of any of those people feeling good about paying the difference after their trial expires is close to nil, regardless of how well the teachers do their job." They'll just find the next studio they haven't tried yet and wait for the sure-to-come Groupon deal for the studios they have already visited.

And when the focus is on the cost of attendance, the thing that is truly valuable about yoga—the interpersonal connections and conveyance of yogic practices between the teachers and students—simply disintegrates. J ends his blog post with this:

"As we look to the future, yoga centers with the courage to buck trends and embrace smaller numbers that foster deeper, more mutual relationships between teachers, students and owners will not only be setting a better foundation to operate from, but possibly become an example of a more human-driven economics. I can think of no

better industry than yoga to experiment in these regards.”

Well J, I can think of an industry that is just as capable of experimenting with embracing smaller numbers and fostering relationships. In fact, the garden center industry is beyond experimenting and can actually be an example for how yoga studios can stay small while building a sense of community that outshines their size. Smaller garden centers can concentrate on top-rated customer service, knowledgeable staff, special orders and broad range of products. Then there is the wealth of opportunities available in workshops and community-building and charity events. All of this together, that’s the solid foundation for operation. That’s what enables the human-driven economics to start churning.

So, newly open yoga studio right down the hill from me, it’s nice to see that you’re choosing not to pack the classes with Groupon-wielding students (and passing that loss-leader product along to the teacher). I’m looking forward to smaller classes, students eager to learn and teachers who know their craft. And for a new studio, the list of upcoming workshops is impressive! Now, if I can only talk you into decorating the space with some lush tropical plants. **GP**