



SCORE column: Fitness business finds its niche

Paul Schneider loves fitness. He started dancing when he was 7 years old and spent his childhood and teen years learning tap, jazz, ballet, modern and ballroom dance. In 2008, he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater with a degree in health and fitness, but quickly discovered that he felt stymied working for someone else.

"It just came to me," Schneider said. "I started thinking outside of the box and came up with the idea for an on-site fitness program. Almost immediately, I ran with it."

He already had a strong fitness background and was a certified instructor, but lacked business experience. Looking for an expert opinion, he contacted SCORE.

"I had no business background and wanted to get some professional guidance on what I was getting myself into," he said. "The main thing was learning how to write a business plan and getting feedback on whether I had a sound idea. I needed to do more critical thinking versus the fantasy of owning a business."

In a matter of days, Schneider drafted his business plan. As a recent college graduate, he had limited resources and liked the lower start-up costs related to this type of business. He didn't need to allocate money for inventory, payroll or rent. It was a matter of defining his business model and figuring out how to market it.

"My niche is convenience," he said. "This is an on-site fitness program that goes to various locations. I am a firm believer that exercise is for everyone and that anyone can do it. This makes it more accessible to everyone."

Schneider offers classes at assisted living centers, schools, businesses and other locations. His specialties are Zumba, a mixture of dance and fitness, and yoga. Classes are modified for the group with offerings such as Zumba gold that allows participants to exercise while sitting in a chair.

He says that Zumba is a favorite because of the fun factor. People love dancing and moving, and smiles abound. For Schneider, it is a dream job.

"I am following the beat of my own drummer. I could dance all day, and feel like I am being true to myself," he said.

Schneider continues to mentor with SCORE as new issues arise. As a manager, bookkeeper, marketer, webmaster and sole employee, he is learning every day. He'd like to grow the business to offer classes throughout Northeastern Wisconsin with a broader range of classes and teachers. The business is ahead of initial projections, and experiences like he had recently at N.E.W. Curative Rehabilitation make him feel like he's succeeding in his goal to make fitness fun.

"I had a scheduled class of Zumba gold and when I walked in, there were about 50 people sitting in their chairs and waiting for me to arrive," Schneider said. "I walked in the door and they started clapping and cheering. Seeing how happy everyone was made everything feel worthwhile."

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and assistant district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.