

REWARDING YOUR EXISTING STUDENTS



How to build and nurture
your existing student base

**UPSIDE DOWN
COACHING**

Obviously we need new students coming in all the time to replace people who leave, fill up new classes and grow the business as a whole. However, when you're chasing that new blood it can be really easy to forget (and therefore neglect!) your existing student base. Your regulars are your bread and butter, they pay your bills and you can rely on them for the most part to show up each week. Don't take that for granted!

How often have you been seduced by new customer discounts on phone contracts, utilities, streaming services, etc? Try us for free, get a 12 month discount, etc. Then when your introductory bonuses run out and you're left paying full price, you're more likely to seek out the next new deal. I switch utilities every year because they almost never do any deals for loyal customers, it's all new customers only! This feels very unfair when you've been giving them money all this time and have been a loyal customer.

- **Memberships build loyalty, but you need more**

Obviously when someone signs up for a membership or buys a block of classes they get a discount on each class and this is what encourages them to sign up. However, this doesn't always necessarily equate to loyalty, especially with credit packs. I can't count how many emails I get a month from people asking for their credits to be extended because they haven't used them, and my credit packs have quite a long expiry date! People go for the deal without necessarily thinking about anything more than 'this is cheaper'. So they don't always use their credits up and if they've lost credits and therefore lost money, they're more likely to drop off. No loyalty has been built there.

- Add perks

I give my existing students perks to encourage them to keep attending. People on recurring memberships get discounts on show tickets, merchandise and coffee in the studio. We also send emails out to them every so often with a discount code just for them. Specialist workshops that cost non-members £25 will cost them one credit. So I'm not squeezing any extra money out of them, nor am I discounting things that they would be buying already, like their class packs. This discount on the extras makes them feel like they're getting more for the money they've spent, because they are!

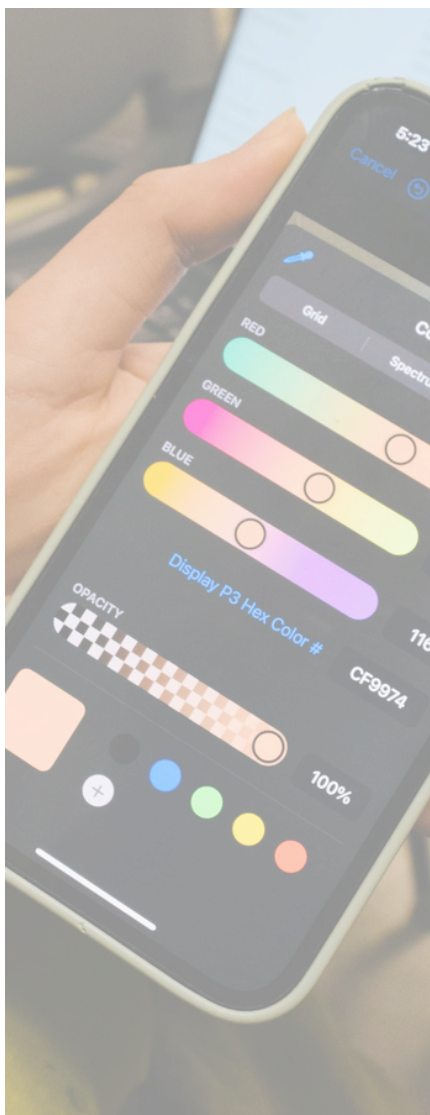
You can also do priority booking for busy classes and workshops. If you have a visiting instructor you could let your members book their slots first.

We've held free jams and socials for our members which all builds loyalty (and I use these opportunities to take photos for marketing!)



important tip

If you're using newsletters, put your long-term members into their own list and send them specialist emails thanking them for their loyalty. Just feeling appreciated goes a long way!



- Use loyalty programmes

If you're like me you'll have a wallet stuffed full of loyalty cards from coffee shops awaiting that magical 10th stamp. There was a Costa next to my studio and we all had the app to save up those points and get that free coffee. I noticed more and more coffee shops using digital loyalty points from third party apps. Not all these apps work for a business like ours where people aren't paying for classes at the front desk, but some booking systems have them built in. I use Wix's loyalty programme and I know Go Team Up has one as well. You might find your booking system has one included.

The way I operate my loyalty programme is that every time a student pays for a class or credit pack online or merchandise/coffee in the studio they get a star. When they get 100 stars they can claim a free class. Coffee shops tend to do the 10th drink free but their margins are bigger than ours, a free coffee only costs them a pound or so. A free class for us is more than that so that's why they only get a freebie when they've got 100 points. However, once they've reached 100 points they then go up to the next level where they can earn 2 points per transaction so they get to their 100 points twice as quick.



Handy Tip

Even if your booking system doesn't have a loyalty programme, most booking systems have something like birthday emails when it's a student's birthday so you could use that to send a free class discount. Little things like this make people feel special.

Loyalty is personal

For someone to be loyal to a studio, they have to feel like they're not just a walking wallet to you. They need to feel valued and appreciated and this is not always financial. The smallest things go a long way to building loyalty, such as knowing people's names and remembering something they told you last week.

Maybe you know roughly where they live and traffic was bad that way today, so you could ask them if they got stuck. Maybe they had a tough week at work last week so you could ask if this week was better. Maybe they got a new puppy, let's see the photos! All these things build up loyalty and they create that community feeling in the studio. This one will be on the teachers more than you because you

can only properly build rapport with your own students that you see every week.

However, next time you have a teacher meeting you can raise this with them and see if you can suggest some of these things so they can be aware of how they can make their environment more welcoming. Maybe they can have a group chat with their students that new people can be added to so they can share progress pics, etc. I find the teachers who have their own group chats have the busiest classes and this is no coincidence.

Do be careful with this one though - your teachers are freelancers and you can only expect them to do what you pay them to do. You cannot force them to engage in group chats outside of their working hours and you can't make them build rapport with students. However, you'll probably find that the teachers who don't make their students feel loved will have quieter classes anyway and the numbers speak for themselves. It's in everyone's best interests to build customer loyalty.

If your teachers don't want to have a group chat you can always make your own but obviously this is a lot of work to maintain, especially if you're the only one writing in there.

On a personal note I really enjoy teaching students I've known a long time and I love watching them grow. I'm sure your teachers feel the same.

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What else do I need to do?

I've given you a lot of Do's in building loyalty, but here's a big DON'T!

I said earlier that you cannot force loyalty. One of the biggest mistakes I see studios making is trying to force loyalty out of their students by

- telling them they should be attending more classes if they want to progress more
- banning them from attending other studios
- shaming them for absences

People have their own lives and we are often just a hobby to them. If people feel like they're being judged for any of the above things they're more likely to go to another studio where they're not made to feel like that!

If they don't come back for a while, welcome them back like they've never left. If they go to another studio, ask them what they learned there. If they can only go to one class a week, give them more encouragement so they don't get despondent about their progress! Make that one class special, every week.