

Recommendation for Leigh O'Brien

In this recommendation of Leigh O'Brien, my Pilates teacher of 12 years, I'll begin by providing some personal background. Over the past 35 years I have worked as an English and French teacher, an interpersonal facilitator, a writer and editor, and most recently, as a business and life coach.

Having struggled with neck and lower back pain for many years, I ended up nursing two slipped discs, one lumbar, one cervical; no matter what the treatment protocols, I had repeated injuries and would spend months in rehabilitation. I started Pilates with Leigh on my chiropractor's enthusiastic recommendation in 2007. I attribute my core strength, flexibility, balance and heightened resilience to my Pilates journey with Leigh.

I see Leigh twice weekly, once for a 2-person class and once for an individual session. This protocol offers me the best of both worlds. I enjoy the stimulus of working in a class with a familiar partner, whose strength is matched to my own; there is an energy that is infectious and an ease in working together on beneficial routines. Leigh is always attentive to individual physical and energetic fluctuations and tailors each class accordingly. The individual class is a privileged space for close attention to my specific needs; it is a time of mindful focus, attention to breathing, a mixture of familiar routines and variety and Leigh's ability to adapt the session to my current condition. I look forward to every session; Pilates energises my week.

One of my definitive criteria for choosing Leigh is that she is a highly skilled Stott practitioner. For my particular injuries, the specificity of what the Stott equipment can target, the rigour of the method, the excellence of the training, the global track record of reliability and excellence and the professionalism of its trainers make Stott the method of choice. In the past, I attended Pilates classes in several gyms. The classes, though enjoyable, were unable – in the context of big classes and basic equipment - to offer any targeted, adequately monitored assistance.

To describe Leigh only as an exemplary trainer would be reductive, however. Leigh is so much more than the sum of these parts. A person who can continue to encourage, guide, elevate and motivate for twelve years has rare qualities - she is indeed a true teacher. A more committed, focused and diligent trainer would be hard to find. Never one to rest on her laurels, Leigh takes every opportunity to upskill; she has an insatiable appetite for continued professional growth and stays abreast of developments. In her manner, Leigh is empathic and calm, intuitive and disciplined. She has an infectious laugh and is generous and kind. Her clients feel understood, never complacent but rather motivated and encouraged. The fondness Leigh's clients feel for her is palpable in the studio.

I would not hesitate to recommend Leigh O'Brien as a Pilates trainer, mentor, human being extraordinaire.

Tracy Symmonds

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