

Chapter 1

A Most Rewarding Independent Music Studio: The Goal

Whether you teach in an academic setting or have an independent studio business, you may be facing some of the following questions:

- Are you spending 16 weeks each semester day in and day out at your piano, teaching lesson after lesson after lesson?
- Are you suffering from monotony and isolation?
- Are you weary of the same old routine?
- Is your creativity waning?
- Are you stuck in the same repertoire?
- Do you suffer from boredom caused by a lack of artistic and intellectual stimulation?
- Are you tired of hearing only what **you** have to say?
- Are you feeling a lack of professionalism in what you do?
- Do your clients treat you as the professional you are?
- Do you feel that your studio is just a hobby?
- Is your financial compensation commensurate with your qualifications?
- Do you get paid when students do not show up?
- Are you scraping by financially because your recital costs take too much out of your pay?
- Are you afraid to set fees that reflect what your instruction really is worth?
- Do you feel businesslike in what you do?
- Would you like to rejuvenate your studio experience?
- Do you feel your studio could be more rewarding, both artistically and financially?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, this text is for you!

It continually amazes us how often we speak with studio instructors who do not feel highly affirmed in their profession. The number of independent teachers who do not operate their studios like professional businesses is astonishing. It is interesting to

see that many teachers with advanced degrees do not ask for compensation that matches their qualifications and experience level. It is unfortunate that they do not earn rates comparable to professionals in other fields. It is sad that many private studio teachers are bored with their work.

Guess what? *What you do is worthy of every bit of respect, pride, success, financial compensation and enjoyment as found in any other profession.* This realization is the first step in gaining ground to develop a rewarding studio business. You must disregard the false assumption that teaching singing lessons is somehow “less than” and start believing that what you offer is a highly valued service. The more you believe this fact and act on it, the more your studio will bring you success and rewards. The bottom line is: *you should be fairly compensated for your work, and your work should be satisfying.*

CONCEPT

As performers, we know that the manner of presentation is everything. What the audience sees creates an expectation that affects their reactions, both positive and negative. The same is true in our profession; perception affects expectation. The package you present will either breed a successful business or it won't; the choice is up to you!

The next step in building a rewarding studio is to develop your studio concept. Accordingly, you can develop the package of features you want your clients to see.

Ask yourself the following questions

- What kind of a studio do I want to have?
- Do I want to collaborate, and if so, with whom and in what capacity?
- What is my specialty?
- What types of students do I want to work with?
- How do I want to structure my studio?

PROCESS

This text offers an abundance of topics that will help you pinpoint and realize your concept. As you work through the worksheets at the end of each chapter, you will arrive at your individual studio model.

This text covers all of the topics associated with the private studio

- Studio Philosophy
- Studio Policy
- Selecting a Location
- Master Classes
- Marketing
- Web Site
- Collaboration
- Events
- Conflict Resolution
- Possibilities for Expansion
- Results

The goal in this process is to create an efficient model that works for you. Students and parents prefer an organized, easy to understand organizational structure. They gravitate toward businesses that look professional and upscale, and respond to visible results and positive experiences. ***Your clients want to be a part of something that feels special.***

COLLABORATIVE FACTOR

Working together with likeminded professionals can add vitality and interest to your endeavors. Do you want to go solo or collaborate? How much collaborating are you interested in doing?

Collaboration exists in multiple forms and degrees of involvement

- Full time business partner: *Studio Bella Voce* business model
- Associates: employees working for you
- Liaisons with other studios: master classes, workshops, joint endeavors
- Liaisons with other organizations: community performances

- Institutional collaboration: collaborative master classes and performances
- Studio Events: community service projects, unique concert offerings

The solitary studio sometimes promotes isolation for you and your students, and can breed stagnation in routine, repertoire and creativity. It can add to boredom from a lack of artistic and intellectual input.

There are benefits to collaboration:

- Multiple minds vs. one: benefits all teachers and students.
- Shared administrative responsibilities: less work for the time
- Shared financial responsibilities: The Bigger Pot
- Travel companions: professional development
- Ensemble performance partners: recitals and community events
- Co-directors and Substitutes: ensembles, lessons and master classes

One of the most rewarding aspects of *Studio Bella Voce* is the concept of collaboration. For this reason, there are chapters devoted to this topic as well as the inclusion of a “collaborative factor” in each chapter. Any of the ideas presented can be adopted in full, in part, or molded to suit your specific studio concept.

RESULT

The positive results of building a rewarding studio business are self-perpetuating. Our journey in building *Studio Bella Voce* has been one of the most exciting adventures of a lifetime—and a studio business should be exciting. During the first year of business we lost money, but laughed a lot, as we learned some very important lessons by trial and error. We hope this book will eliminate some of these pitfalls for you. Currently, we are earning the best possible income from our efforts, simply by having an efficient and effective business model. While we enjoy helping young singers to grow, we also reap the benefits of having a colleague close by for support and to share success. Even though we no longer live in the same city, we maintain a strong collaboration that now crosses the plains of Texas.

In the Red!

We just sat there, staring at each other, looking down at the red figures on the page, and staring at each other again. How could this be! Our first year at *Studio Bella Voce* had been successful in many ways; nonetheless, now we were in the RED!!! We knew that as two highly intelligent and creative women with master's degrees, we could create and market successfully. But obviously neither one of us could add two and two—or perhaps we just didn't take the time to do so. It was a humbling experience to say the least. After the shock waves passed, we sensed it was time to regroup.

We tried to take an honest look and had to agree that our biggest pitfalls in our first year of business were handling money and our focus on studio priorities. Our policies, business practices and priorities needed an overhaul. Although we didn't know it then, the hole we had dug for ourselves would be easy to climb out of with two of us working together.

Many of us don't feel comfortable asking for money. We somehow think that we won't get it or that we will inconvenience others when we ask. We know we provide a service, but for some reason, we are not totally convinced of its value. Like so many others in service-oriented businesses, our expenses exceeded our income. That was problem number one. The second problem was a poor business plan. In our excitement about this new joint venture, we neglected a cardinal rule of business: stay in the black.

We listed our financial mistakes:

- We booked our Victorian Carolers for several Christmas shows, and then supplied the music and the costumes
- We provided masters classes for our students, but neglected to factor in the cost of refreshments
- We took our singing group on tour, and then paid for dinners along the way
- We had an a cappella group in the spring, but failed to anticipate the cost of outfits and music

We realized that we were going nowhere until we began to charge fees that reflected our actual expenses. We needed to establish professional financial policies and to focus on reprioritizing our goals and expectations.

As we sat at the table and recounted the absolutely ridiculous things we gave away as freebees during our first year, we just shook our heads. With renewed determination to follow through with new policies, we set a better course from that day forward. We would run the studio as a business with sound financial policies and focus to prioritize things that are really important. Year two was fabulous with very few hurdles. The bottom line ended in the BLACK!

THE VERDICT

Treat your studio as a worthy business. If you make it valuable, your clients will treat it as such. Prioritize and focus on the things that are most important. Watch your money and your time. This is your studio! Make it work for you now and for years to come!



WORKSHEET¹***A Most Rewarding Independent Music Studio:
The Goal*****Formulating Your Wish List**

Whether you already have a studio or are just beginning to establish one, make a list of 1-8 items that you would like to see implemented in your studio

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

What types of collaboration interest you?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

¹ All worksheets presented in this book are available for free download at www.voiceinsideview.com and may be reprinted without restriction, provided credit is given to their source

Describe in a few sentences the type of studio that fits your highest ideal

Read on, and go for it!