

Tapping to Success



Eric White • May 2, 2020

Standing in the wings, dressed in brightly colored and sparkling costumes in the moments before being called onto stage, a group of young girls and boys bounce with excitement. They are ready for their moment under the lights. Months of choreography practice, costume fittings, sore muscles, long hours and more than a few tears all comes down to the next three minutes. At last, the routine number is called by the announcer and the dancers take their place at center stage to a round of applause. In the darkened arena are hundreds of mothers, fathers, grandparents, friends, dancers, and instructors. Each with attention focused on the performers. Directly in

front of the stage, their faces illuminated by stage-light, are the three judges who are themselves studio owners and professional dancers. As they wait for the first notes of the music to begin, the judges have already started taking notes and recording scores. Still in the wings, looking on with a bright, proud smile, is the choreographer of this routine and owner of Acapriccio Dance Company, Jennifer Kinsey. She has given them all the tools they need to succeed on stage. Now she knows, it's all up to the kids.

This is competitive dance for children ages three to nineteen.



Jennifer Kinsey

With hundreds of currently enrolled students, Acapriccio offers classes in ballet technique, various styles of jazz, tumbling, hip-hop, and Jennifer's favorite, tap for all skill levels are welcome from beginner to advanced. Recreational dancers perform on stage a couple times per year at studio recitals. Competition dancers are on stage for recitals and compete against other studios at four competitions per year in the Omaha area and throughout the Midwest. The team has also been invited to dance for the crowds at Disney World several times. Because of the studio's success, a fourth studio space was recently added at the school to accommodate the high demand for classes.

Jennifer has brought Acapriccio a long way since the early days in 1998 when she held her first classes. At 22 years old, she was an instructor at another local school, but felt the owner was holding her, and her students, back from their full potential.

"The studio I taught for was a little restricting on allowing us to teach what I truly felt was possible for younger dancers to achieve," Jennifer says. "Even just basic beginner technique or ballet positions. I knew there was a way to pass those along and still make it fun for younger dancers. So that was truly why I decided to create a space for dancers to be able to learn!"

The young entrepreneur already had years of experience dancing, competing, and instructing. What Jennifer didn't have was a deep background in business. It was clear there was a need in the area for this expanded type of instruction, but without a lot of resources she began researching a way to make her dream a reality. Luckily, the LaVista Recreation Center had opened not long before and was offering space for rent.

"I had heard they had a dance space inside that was typically available. We thought this would be the perfect set-up as we were getting started," she explains, "Very little overhead, word of mouth, and kids in the same building looking for activities was a huge perk of being in the Rec Center." It was the

perfect set up and the community responded to Jennifer's strategy of giving her students a deeper dance experience. Within five years they outgrew their space at the Rec Center and moved into their current location at 8610 Brentwood Drive.

Jennifer and her husband of twenty years, Jeremy Kinsey, have 4 children (all boys) and live just about a mile away from the studio. I asked Jennifer about her relationship with the Papillion/LaVista area and how that has helped her business along the way.

"As a business owner, the Papillion/LaVista area just feels like home. It's almost like I've always had a connection to this community all of my life. It's amazing to see how connected everyone is and how small town it truly feels. We are so blessed to be a part of this community!"

Jennifer's recipe for success has coincided with a boom in the dance industry over the past twenty years. Televised dance programs and competitions have grown in popularity which has inspired many more parents to get their kids signed up for classes.

IBISWorld.com reports the past five years alone have shown an average annual revenue increase of 3.8% up to \$4.0 billion across the dance studio industry in the United States. That success has led to the more than fifty-three thousand dance studios opening up across the country as of 2020. This is evident as a simple Google search results in more the twenty-five dance studios across the Omaha metro area.

When asked what she thinks makes Acapriccio stand out amongst so much competition, Jennifer tells me, "I would like to think it's our personal approach with our dancers. We love them so much! We feel so fortunate to be able to teach them and be a part of their growth year after year. Our dancers truly feel like an extension of our family."

This sentiment is echoed by studio parents as well. Michaela Kaye, who has two daughters, Bella and Jemma, on the competition team tells me, "I feel that by being at Acapriccio [my girls] have gained an extended family. The staff supports them not only in the studio, but outside the studio as well." Michaela also dispels the misperceptions that some people have about competition dance based on the poor example set by overly dramatized television shows. "They are not judged on whether they win or lose, but if they improve. They are being taught sportsmanship as well



Jennifer poses with dancers and staff just before an acrobatics performance.

from their teachers."

Jennifer openly admits to having a Type-A personality, which has served her well as an entrepreneur. "I love checking items off of a to-do list." Creating complicated class schedules for hundreds of students, organizing recitals, coordinating competition schedules, marketing strategy, keeping the lights on, and everything else that comes along with running a small business, on top of choreographing and teaching classes, is no easy task. Jennifer attributes her



From left to right, Brianna Mather, Kelsey Hollenbeck, Jennifer Kinsey, Sarah Meyers, McKenzie Baltzell, and Brianna Wilcox. Not pictured, Peyton Campbell.

strengths in organization and self-motivation for keeping her focused on work through the 80 plus hours per week she puts in to keep everything running smoothly. “We’re always trying to work 3 or 4 steps ahead of what we’re experiencing in real time within the walls of the studio.” Jennifer says. “We have to be planning months in advance for what’s to come!”

Bridget Kwasniewski, mother to three kids on the team, Cadence, Mason and Reese, spoke to me about Jennifer’s ability to keep the studio running smoothly. “Jennifer is an amazing dance owner and choreographer. She is organized and does a great job keeping everyone well informed of what is going on whether it be practices, competitions, recitals and everything else. She has an amazing staff that are just as committed to the studio and dancers as she is.”

In fact, Jennifer gives a lot of credit for the

success of Acapriccio to her nine paid employees. This includes her dance instructors Sarah Meyers, Brianna Wilcox, Kelsey Hollenbeck, McKenzie Baltzell, Peyton Campbell and Brianna Mather who collaborate, choreograph, and teach classes all year long.

Still, Jennifer never set out to be an entrepreneur. “I think I only fell into this because I saw a need and went for it. I honestly was too young to realize how scary it was at the time, I just jumped in!” Many of her successes and failures have come not by research, analysis and reporting, but instead they came by doing what she knows and does best, or by trial and error. “We just stick to running the best program we can and if something we try doesn’t work well, we just chalk it up to experience.”

For instance, when asked about how she markets her business Jennifer tells me they mainly stick to word-of-mouth and social media (Facebook and

Instagram) but over the years have tried several avenues and while not all have been successful she looks to the net positive result of each.

“We’ve used newspaper ads, coupon books, postcard mailers in the past. And honestly, even if it only resulted in 1 new sign up, I would say it was worth it. You never know what an asset one dancer could be to you personally or year after year in the studio!”

The studio name, which people love but is often misspoken, especially by the littlest dancers when put on the spot under the bright lights on stage, is pronounced Ah-Cah-Preesh-Eee-Oh. It is a unique word that stands out from other studios which are often named after an owner or their city of origin. Jennifer’s journey to this name is a bit old school. “All I knew was that I wanted to be at the beginning of the Yellow Pages for Dance Studios (don’t laugh!).” Jennifer explains. “So I

opened our encyclopedia (again, no laughing allowed - google wasn’t a thing back then!) and chose a word that spoke to me that was at the beginning of the alphabet.” Jennifer decided on Acapriccio. An adverb related to music performed at whatever tempo or with whatever expression the performer wishes. “I thought this was a perfect name to choose for our dance studio!”

I asked Jennifer what she might say to a young entrepreneur just starting out in a new business. Her advice, “Be flexible! Have a game plan but be willing to tweak that as needed because you’ll definitely need to! Be brave and just go for it! (Even though 44 year old me would never do this ever again!!)”

As we turn our attention back to the stage and those kids about to leap into action, the lessons they have learned from Jennifer ring true. Her example leads them towards Double Platinum.



Be Bold.

Be Brave.