

# NEWS FOR FITNESS PROFESSIONALS



## Interview with Stacey Lei Krauss

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# Interview with Stacey Lei Krauss

by Susan Kasper



Stacey Lei Krauss is a young athletic woman whose personality is bigger than her actual stature. In fact, everything about her is big, from her passion to her smile. When she came onto the fitness scene, it was apparent that she wanted to make an impact in an industry that needed a shot in the arm. Stacey's creative energy allowed her to move into many principles of exercise and soon after, create a successful business model while staying true to her self.

**Q: How did you come to the career that you are currently in?**

**A:** I began teaching aerobics in the late 80's while in college. The first semester of freshman year wrecked my body when I'd replaced cheerleading practice for beer and pizza. To get back on track I made a "mix tape," choreographed a routine, and taught hi-impact aerobics in our dorm lounge two nights each week. It was a great bonding experience for the dorm, and subsequently developed into a fun part-time job throughout college.

ECA gave me my first opportunity to present at a conference and Jay Blahnik was my primary mentor. Jay is brilliant at delivering sophisticated information in a simple and interesting package (a challenging skill!). I've owned fitness consulting businesses, and managed group fitness programs for prestigious clubs, but through it all I taught classes and trained clients; working very long hours seven days a week, simply because I loved it. I just love inspiring people to move.

My current career takes me all over the country and abroad. I'm a master trainer for The Nautilus Institute and for BOSU, and a teacher trainer for Peak Pilates' new MVe Fitness Fusion program. I've been an instructor/educator for almost a decade. Inspiring instructors is my absolute passion - because if I can excite instructors, the message will become infectious and exponential.

**Q: What were some of the challenges you faced - and how did you overcome them?**

**A:** As much fun as the fitness industry can be, it's also incredibly competitive. Because trainers and instructors are such emotionally-charged people, I have found myself in situations that have seriously tested my self-confidence. My workshop titled "Mean Girls" reminds instructors that we ALL go through these situations, and we can ALL manage them with grace. Self-talk is necessary to get through those sticky moments, so at the end of the day, I revert to important reminders.

Some of the best advice I've ever received was from NYC Diva Rique Uresti who told me, "Don't EVER perform for someone who is not applauding for you." I remind myself that not everyone is going to love what I do, or how I do it, but those people who DO support, trust and believe in me deserve my undivided attention and unbridled energy. So rather than getting tangled in negativity, I do my best and continually move toward the light. Ultimately, the biggest lesson has been to trust my intuition and live my life the way I believe is best for me.

Never be distracted by what "they" say or do and don't take things personally.

Secondly, as fitness pioneer Jeff Martin once shared with me: "You can't trademark a grapevine." Once I learned to "give it away" and spread my knowledge of movement freely (rather than holding it tightly in fear) my career (and life) began to bloom. Our business is about inspiring, sharing, and helping people flourish.

**Q: What accomplishments are you most proud of - and why.**

**A:** I am proud to be a sponsored Nike Elite Instructor. Through Nike, I've been involved with smart, innovative collaborations, such as Nike Sports Music on iTunes. These projects have allowed me to reach out to the population that doesn't exercise on a regular basis and help them to start moving. I get emails from people all over the country who would never even consider stepping into a gym, and I feel fortunate to have an opportunity to inspire people outside our typical fitness sub-culture.

Another great accomplishment was running my first marathon in 2005- the Nike Women's Marathon. I ran 26.2 miles and have never felt so empowered. It gave new meaning to my personal mantra "Trust Your Feet". Every fitness instructor should run a marathon - you'll learn so much about yourself, I promise. Now 26.2 miles seems like "nothing" compared to some of my newer, loftier goals.

Without question, my "baby", willPower & grace™ has been my greatest achievement and contribution to the fitness industry. It has earned me an ECA OBOW Award, as well as countless media accolades. I'm really proud of it, as the content has a proven track record, and the instructors who teach it across the country are talented, passionate, and amazing leaders.



**Q: How did the willPower and Grace™ program come to be?**

**A:** willPower & grace™ was born in 1999 in New York City, and developed as a fusion of various disciplines; yoga, pilates, old-school calisthenics and dance principles. It came about during the height of the kick-boxing craze, and it offered a cardio-sculpting alternative for those people who could not relate to the competitive nature of kickboxing. Post NYC tragedy in 2001, willPower & grace™ emerged as a philosophically-rich workout, that was as mindfully uplifting as it was physically challenging. "What if you HAD to?" became our theme, and now the willPower philosophy has spread from society women in NYC to surfers in CA, snowboarders in CO, and hundreds of college students across the country. It's a beautiful cycle; creating a workout which helps college students combat the beer and pizza syndrome I had become part of.

**Q: What was the inspiration for your barefoot program?**

**A:** I had always taken class barefoot... it felt natural, and made sense to me. One morning I arrived to teach class and had forgotten workout shoes. I taught with naked feet that day, and subsequently, barefoot just stuck. I signed with Nike in 2004 as a result of my barefoot practice, as they were on the verge of launching the Nike Free shoe. Now, I educate instructors on the importance of barefoot training ("You've got 58 muscles in your feet... wake them up!") From stimulating the abundance of sensory receptors in the feet to application of the overload principle; barefoot training can enhance balance and movement confidence. From a reflexology approach, we have the capacity to encourage our own wellness from within. We've seen Olympic gold medals from barefoot runners, and dozens of eastern practices are barefoot. Even aerobics began as a barefoot activity! Barefoot training is not necessarily revolutionary - it's evolutionary. I'm proud to be one of the first to recognize this movement in our industry and empower it. (Thanks for helping me spread the word, ECA!)

**Q: What is your own personal philosophy? And how do you integrate it into your public life and work?**

**A:** My philosophy is simple: "Move with Integrity." I am so far from perfect - I make mistakes all the time. However, I don't lie or cheat or steal. I try hard, every day, to be a better person than I was yesterday, and someone whom others can trust. I believe in the karmic cycle, and believe that The Universe is fair and balanced. When I "Move with Integrity" in my life, it all finds it's way back, even if it takes a while. (Patience is one of Seven Virtues.) I go to sleep every night with a clear conscious; this enables me to live without fear. With respect to exercise, "Move with Integrity" still makes perfect sense. Technique, technique, technique.... keep it clean.

**Q: Do you find yourself able to "see" someone's lifestyle by their feet? And does that reflect on your work with them?**

**A: GREAT question!!! yes yes yes....**

In the fitness industry, a seasoned trainer can tell a LOT about a person in the way he or she moves (if she is scared, timid or shy... aggressive, calculating or flamboyant.) So - yes, in the same sense - it's pretty easy to read feet. Humans manifest fear by curling their toes. I see a lot of tight, rigid (and painfully gnarly) toes and high arches on the personalities who are uptight, rigid, constricted and uber-conventional. These people are generally very disconnected from their feet, display balance issues, and cannot wiggle their toes independently of one another and have some chronic pain somewhere in the ankle-knee-hip-back chain. In this case, we work on self massage, deceleration skills, and overall foot flexibility. Barefoot is a tough sell with these folks, but with time and trust - the results are astounding.

Beautifully soft and well-manicured feet are a result of enhanced comfort and nurturing. These are generally pleasant personalities who are open to new possibilities. However, these gentle flowers often have a low tolerance for pain, trouble landing on their own two feet, and need to build strength and toughen up.

I broke up with a man because even though he was in great shape, he had flabby, soft and weak fallen arches. Although I attempted to help, he and I battled on the importance of foot strengthening, so I had to fire him. I could probably write a entire foot-personality-profile article that would end up published on some crazy foot-fetish website.

At the end of the day, well-conditioned feet are always obvious. They're good-looking feet. Motor control of the toes is established after only a few classes and movement confidence increases in every workout. These people are really in-tune with their bodies; grounded, stable, confident and balanced. (Of course no one is perfect, so you might notice a weird little toenail...)

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**Q: What is on the horizon for you?**

**A:** An insider's sneak peak before the launches? Well, ok... but only for ECA....

"The Seven Steps to willPower" is my newest video and workout. Adapted from the ancient "Five Tibetan Rites", it is a functional, equipment free workout which takes only 15 minutes. This can be a smart and interesting warm-up for classes and workouts and a great way for instructors and trainers to integrate a yogic modality into other formats. Athletes respect the benefits of the seven simple exercises and the sequence has been especially successful with high-school athletes. The video is so hip - it's very different than most workout videos, and releases mid-June. The soundtrack is incredible thanks to Fitness DJ Deekron, who also created a full-length CD to accompany the workout - set at 100bpm, it's an eclectic, sexy, mind-body mix called WillPower Chill.

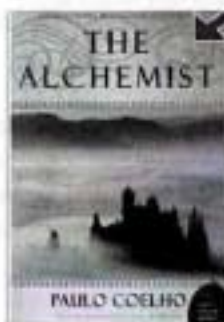
I'm on the advisory board for a brilliant new program by fitness guru David Mesirov, called Beaming™. It's mindful, barefoot - and completely cutting edge. Beaming may revolutionize the way we approach fitness - launching in July, and I am very excited about the prospects.

And finally, this summer in San Francisco I'll be kicking off "Run Free" - a barefoot conditioning program for the Nike Women's Marathon. Our team will be teaching runners how to use their feet by incorporating exercises and practices from my Sole Training program.

**HERE ARE THE BOOKS THAT STACEY RECOMMENDS:**



— **The Art of Peace** by Morihei Ueshiba  
(A guide to daily living) greater aliveness and creativity and to a transformation of the world around you.



— **The Alchemist** by Paulo Coelho  
( "To realize one's destiny is a person's only obligation.")



— **The Velveteen Rabbit** by Margery Williams  
(thoughts become things...)



— **Crime and Punishment** by Fyodor Dostoyevsky  
(yes, really. I've read it 4 times)

**Oryx & Crake** by Margaret Atwood.

Think: Adam & Eve meets futuristic bio-engineering. I laughed out loud, got weepy, and have been haunted for four years since I first read it. Although it's a fantasy novel, the story of The Snowman has an eerie familiarity that echoes whenever I turn on NPR. It's terrifying and amazing.

**The Good Body** By Eve Ensler

(author of "The Vagina Monologues")

This quick read is a collection of women's monologues from around the globe. Every trainer should read this book as reinforcement of what's TRULY happening in our female clients' minds. Eve says: "Tell the image makers and magazine sellers and the plastic surgeons that you are not afraid. That what you fear the most is the death of imagination and originality and metaphor and passion. Then be bold and LOVE YOUR BODY. STOP FIXING IT. It was never broken.

**STACEY'S WISH LIST FOR 2009:**

- To be training high school and college students regularly; I want to give the kids habits that will last a lifetime.
- Obama.
- An excellent standing bow pose.
- A fit and healthy Britney.
- PowerGel in Maderia Port flavor.
- To teach Ellen The Plank.
- Less war and more peace.