

Jillian Michaels

Trinity, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Jillian Michaels:

After graduating from Jacksonville University with a degree in Dance Education, Jillian Michaels, Pasco County Native and Owner of Innovative Studios, moved to a military base in Japan. Her original dream of becoming a performer at Disney was quickly replaced by an opportunity to fill a void in dance programming for the children living on the base. After convincing the U.S. Army Morale, Welfare and Recreation Center to allow her to start a dance program, she expanded her services to two other nearby bases and taught dance classes for five years. Upon returning to the states in 2011, Michaels spent the next nine years 'dabbling' in entrepreneurship before officially opening the doors to Innovative Studios in January 2019.

"During that time, I did a lot of contract work," she said. "I'd rent spaces

and teach dance classes. I also had a Barre fitness company and a ballet academy for homeschool students. I took two and a half years and went back to teaching at a performing arts school and directing a theatre program. During that time, I also worked for other private dance companies. By 2018, I was ready to work for myself. I'd spent a lot of time building other people's businesses and I felt like it was time to see my own ideas come to fruition."

From the time Michaels moved back from Japan until she opened her studio, she, unknowingly built a clientele of supporters and followers.

This gave her confidence as she began to reach out to commercial realtors, business lawyers and accountants to understand her next steps. She also joined CO.STARTERS, a program offered through Pasco County's Economic Development Council. According to Michaels, the program was an incredible resource.

"As a single mom with two kids, it was a struggle to get banks to back me," she said. "The CO.STARTERS program helped me to fill in the gaps and to improve my understanding of the legal, accounting, financial and property issues related to small business ownership. It also helped to reinforce any doubts I was having about myself and my idea. You're surrounded by other entrepreneurs who are there to support you. It's an amazing program."

From the CO.STARTERS program came a micro-loan which allowed Michaels to open her original space. Although it was smaller than what she wanted, it was a good starting point. Within four months, however, she was in need of more space.

"This was actually a good problem to have," she said. "We started small

and built up demand. By July we were approved for a bigger space and by October, we opened the doors to a new 3,500 sqft facility. We had the usual construction setbacks along the way, but it's been such a blessing."

Michaels has grown the business primarily through word-of-mouth referrals. She's worked in many other studios and volunteered in the community. Her reputation and the reputation of her teachers has made a significant impact on the success of her business. Her 'why' is also a strong driver and, as she shared, there's way more to dance than meets the eye.

"The job of teachers and students is to continue to grow," she said. "Our mission is to learn, create, share and grow. Dance is about goal setting and learning discipline. Watching our kids grow and get stronger and happier is so rewarding. Our culture embraces this. We're loving, but also strong. Everything we do is out of love and respect."

Looking ahead, Michaels is focused on building her 'Summer Intensives'.

These are programs that partner with professional performers from sports teams, theme parks and cruise lines to bring in their employees as a way to share with the students. It's a great way for Michaels' students to learn from seasoned performers. The studio is also busy putting together two shows set to debut at the end of spring. Michaels' long term goal is to eventually move into an even bigger space.

What advice does Michael's have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "Get involved with a network of people that have done it and those that have failed," she said. "If things get difficult, it's okay to take a step back and regroup. You can always come back to it. Sometimes setbacks are a

sign that the time isn't right yet. Lastly, if you're building out a space, research that process very thoroughly. Make sure you leave no questions unanswered."

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