

Ep #20: Teaching Yoga Online – Lessons Learned



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With Your Host

Susi Hatley

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hatley. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hatley.

Susi: With this episode I want to dig into some of the key lessons that I have learned over this period of time that started in March of 2020, the time that most of us are calling COVID, this unprecedented time where for many yoga teachers we did a hard pivot. With this episode I want to share some of the things that I've learned. Whether it was through Facebook Lives, teaching private sessions, running workshops and my trainings there has been some really, really key things that I have learned and I was someone who has been online teaching since 2008.

Even with that experience of being online there are things that I have been able to do online that I would have to say that before COVID I never thought were possible. So, with this episode I want to talk a little bit about that and I'll weave in some of the insights that I've heard from some of my trainees and some of my clients about what their insights were with the hope that it will help you navigate wherever you're at within this yoga pivot, this COVID pivot, and what you're planning for your future.

I think my biggest insight or a-ha or super amazement of something that worked really well for me were Facebook Lives. Never in my wildest dreams would I have ever taught a Facebook Live, meaning taught a yoga class on a Facebook Live. But pretty much from the day that we shut down here in Calgary I was on Facebook teaching yoga classes to my computer screen.

Yes, there were many people who were following me. I could see it up in the ticker screen on my Facebook page and many, many, many more watched it after the recording, but it was stunning the feedback that I received from people and that I still receive from people of how it worked even though I could not see them move.

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If you follow me at all you know that I say that a lot like, watch and use your eyes. What are you actually seeing? Then, teach based off of what you're seeing. Well, the only person that I could see was me. So, it became very fascinating very quickly on how I was going to do this and truly it started off being this idea of coming from my heart, of providing something in a really, really crazy time and it was serving myself as much as it was serving other people.

Then, as I've seen how effective this has been it's now just part of my thing. I get up in the morning, I start at 5am, my kids are still asleep, the house is quiet, I put on my iPad or my phone and I say, "Hey, it's just after 5am here in Calgary and we're going to do – " bada, bada, bada. So, I think that's the first key one is I never in my wildest dreams thought that that would be possible.

Yes, I had done very short, 30-second, 5-minute, 7-minute type of videos on Facebook teaching some concept, but to teach a class, I never thought. Now, what's been interesting about that is the number of clients who have come to me for private sessions or for my Therapeutic Yoga Intensive or other offers that I make are coming to me with a much greater understanding of what it is that I do.

Some of the feedback that I've received of people who've known me for a long time has been, "Now I get what you're saying. Now I understand what you mean by moving in a pure range of motion or not compensating. I get it now." So, it's become a really tremendous teaching tool for me, for people who might know some of the work that I do or people who are just getting to know some of the work that I do.

The comments that most warm my heart are people who tell me that they couldn't walk or they couldn't get out of bed very well or they couldn't do X, Y, and Z and after a few weeks or few months they're now able to do a lot more than they've ever done simply by noticing and simply by being aware. For that I will keep doing the Facebook Live because who knew? Who knew that someone could get such benefit when I couldn't even watch

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them or see them or correct a movement or help them grow their awareness directly? So that has been very interesting.

Now, some of the insights that I've gained from running the Facebook Lives are that – I say this a lot because when I started I used my computer and I didn't have any lights and I didn't have a mic. Thankfully, a lot of people still followed me. So, that meant that I could still keep doing it. Shortly into my process I realized I needed some lights and that I needed a better mic and so that's what I did.

I got some lights from a lighting company and I've put the link to that lighting company and the exact lights that I have in the show notes as well as utilizing a mic. Now, the mic is good enough. I'm actually interested in getting a new mic for that particular project, the Facebook Lives. The reason why I would like to get to another one is because the current one that I have is lavalier mic and when I move my arms over my head or I bring my arms across as in doing eagle pose then my arm rubs against the mic or my shirt can rub against the mic and then that could provide some weird feedback for people on the other end.

The other thing that I learned and it may have been the age of my iPad, my iPad which is where I film most of the Facebook Lives is an older one and if I had forgotten to plug it in overnight the battery charge doesn't hold very well. If I kept it plugged in during the Facebook Live and had my mic all set up there would be a buzz in the background. So, I learned that pretty quickly so that I was very cognizant of keeping the iPad plugged in overnight and then if I had forgotten or if I sent the iPad off with the kids because sometimes Stu and the kids will go away and I'm still doing my Facebook Live then I might use my iPhone.

Now, I have an iPhone 11 Pro and I love it. The camera is terrific, the mic is terrific, so that also works really, really well. My Facebook Lives started off as 40- or even 50-minute classes and then they started to whittle their way down to more about 22, 25, and these days they're somewhere in the range of anywhere between 15 and 25 minutes. I focus on a variety of things. I don't necessary set out a specific calendar with every single

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sequence set out a month ahead of time, but I do have all of the theme that I want to focus and how I want to focus on it. So, it's not something that is rigidly planned but is loosely planned.

I also ask pretty regularly through people on my database, my mail list as well as people on Facebook what more would they like me to teach them. So, I weave into sequences and into the classes some of what people are asking me for so that I can address what they are and what they are wanting.

That's one piece of the online puzzle. That has been really quite remarkable. The second piece of the puzzle has been my private sessions. Now, I've taught private sessions online since just after my kids were born, so I was very, very familiar teaching my private sessions online. I think what has happened with the current scenario is that there are more people who are interested in more of them because – partly because of the situation that we're in, but also I'm not seeing people live and in-person quite yet.

Most of my clients are not from my hometown anyway, so that doesn't really matter too much. But generally, people just know that I'm available online and so they're taking that time. There might be people who wouldn't necessarily have done it before.

Some of the things that I've learned to really augment the private session experience is two-fold. The first one is about myself. Because at the beginning of this COVID time I was spending a lot of time sitting on the floor or sitting on bolsters running all of my programs online my sitting posture got a little bit funky and I also developed a bit of foot pain. It took me some realization to figure out that it was actually my sitting position that was creating the foot pain.

So, I recognized that I had to change up what it was that I was doing. One of the things that I did is I used a product called Joy-a-Toes which is something I've used for a while which are toe spreaders. I put that between my toes because sometimes I will just without knowing I would slide my

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foot under my hips and then that would put my foot into a bit of a funky position and that seemed to be the thing that contributed to the foot pain.

Because the Joy-a-Toes are a little bit big I would then feel me doing that unconsciously so it became a conscious act and I could stop that pattern. Along with that I started to shift up the positioning that I had. So, I set myself up at three different levels. I have a lower level and then a standing level and then a level where I can actually sit on the floor.

Then, depending on the time of the day, depending on the session that I'm teaching and who I'm teaching I will set the computer up at those different levels and I may even change it at different points in the session. I, myself, use my Macbook. It's an older Macbook, circa 2013, it's one of the older ones. It's up to date with the current operating software so it works well for what I need it to work for with that Zoom.

When I'm working with my clients, when we're initially setting them up I don't provide people with a lot of parameters because I usually need to fiddle with stuff on the first day anyway, but if someone asks us specifically and they want to prep and make sure that they've got the right space what we typically suggest is that they set up their computer or their tablet, not their phone. I'm not a fan of utilizing a phone – for the client having the phone because the screen is too small, but when they are setting up their tablet or their computer to then turn on whatever media player they have.

So, whether it's QuickTime on Mac and I think it's Windows Media on the Windows product and to set it up and turn it on and if they can – whatever they see I will see. So then they can see how much space they have around and what level they're at.

Now, usually when I log in for that first call with them then I can adjust and modify and ask them to get a chair or get a desk or something of that sort and we just fiddle it out. So, I don't spend a lot of time before the series begins, I spend it more when we're in that first session.

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I might be in a position where I can do that because my series are eight sessions. People purchase a three-month package from me, they're eight classes within that three-month period. So then I don't have to make sure everything is all set up. Those of you who are doing sessions like one-off sessions at a time then maybe sending out parameters for getting the room set up before that session might be helpful.

But again, I find that how people interpret that can be so varied that spending that time on the front end on that first session I find it much, much more helpful. The other thing we do ask of them is to make sure that they are in a distraction-free area and for the most part my clients are those kinds of folks anyway that they have set up their life so that they can be distraction-free.

We do have moments though, like we all do, with kids walking in and things happening because that is what happens. But generally it doesn't really get in the way a lot of the session. My clients don't tend to get really wrapped up in it so even if the dog runs in or the kid runs in naked or whatever it happens. Some kids come in and hug Mom and onward it goes. "Mom, where is this or that?" But it's not common, it doesn't happen often. When it does happen it's just – we all kind of smile and say, "You know, that happens." Again, it's not a big issue for the people that I work with.

When I'm actually teaching utilizing Zoom I don't tend to record the session unless the client specifically asks me to. What I will do is at the very end of the session, when I finish up with about 10 minutes or 15 minutes to go that's when I'll press record and it will be about the program that I'm developing for them that they can then take away and do between this session and the follow-up session.

If the client though asks me that they want to have it on record then I will record it, but what I'll do right near the end is I'll stop the recording and then I'll restart the recording because what that does with Zoom is it creates two separate files. Then the client has access to the whole private session and then they also have the little summary piece so they don't need to scroll all

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the way through that longer one to get to the summary, they can just open up that summary.

I've also had some clients who were live and in-person clients and transitioned to online. They were used to getting like a handout from me with exercises and the program written out for them. Some of them have actually said to me that they still prefer that. So, I'll still do the recording part for them, but I'll also write down the program on the sheet of paper for them, take a photo of it, and then we get it off to them so they have that, so they have both of those because that's what they know and that's what is helpful for them.

Overall, I would say that the value of a private session on Zoom versus in-person is equal and I might even say, in some cases, it's better because the focus on both my part and the client's part is much more heightened. I am unable to touch them so I have to pay very close attention to my ability to see and also pay close attention to the results of what they're doing.

So, I can see clearly if my language is landing for them or is not landing for them. My presence has to be very strong and very clear when I'm working with them so that I'm able to impart the guidance and the teaching that I'm seeing as required for the situation. In that case it could actually be more valuable because my skill has grown in that department so much more strongly because this is the only thing that I'm doing.

Which leads me to the third portion of this which is my workshops and my trainings. I do a lot more workshops online now. It's a fundamental part of my business and I run them over a two hour – in some cases like next week we're doing solving the pain puzzle which is seven hours over four days. Then I also have my Therapeutic Yoga Intensives and, of course, the whole IAYT Yoga Therapy Certification Program and it's been really interesting because I went through a phase early on where I thought, "There's no way that I'm going to be able to teach some of these components of yoga therapy online. You just have to be in person to teach people how to touch. You have to be in-person to teach people how to see. I no longer believe that.

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It's different, that's for sure and it's entirely possible. What I'm seeing from the results having just run two Therapeutic Yoga Intensives and in the middle of a third one that I decided I would run over a 13-week period because the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive is a 6-day program. But I knew that there were going to be some people who were going to have issues around childcare or they were just going to have trouble being on the computer watching Zoom for that many hours in a row over the 6 days, so I offered that was over a 13-week period.

The reason we chose 13 weeks because we already all sorts of other stuff scheduled for the fall. So, it's not every single week it's portions of the week and so some of it is live and on Zoom and then some of it we augment it with video training just to keep the learning process going. I would have to say that, again, there is a focus and a discipline to the process that the results in some cases are better than we're in live. Which tells me that when I do go back and teach live and in-person, and when I say live I mean live and in-person because all of this is happening live just on Zoom.

When I go back and in-person the training is just going to be even better because the focus and specificity of what I'm teaching has just been augmented so much. The other part that has augmented the learning is we send out these support training packages that go along with the training. So, they get a variety of different props and learning tools that go with the training that I haven't necessarily used at the intensive when I was in-person before because we were in-person working with bodies and that package that I sent has been really effective in supporting and their learning process.

The other thing that's been very effective is that in the trainings I have offered them to bring in somebody into their room and we have live teaching portions during the training. In some cases people brought in their spouse or they brought in their friend or they brought in a client so that then I could watch them teach and I could also guide them in their teaching when they're working with their client or their friend or their spouse.

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For those people who didn't have a person then we just use the breakout rooms over Zoom, so then they can actually practice their ability to watch and be with people over Zoom which is where a lot of yoga teachers and health professionals are going anyway so it just augments it.

On a side note, what I find interesting is that the health professionals who are taking the trainings with me, a lot of them are doing telehealth and what they have found, what they have given me feedback on is that their telehealth has actually improved out the experience of watching me do what I do and to support them in the concepts that I'm teaching. So, presence and awareness and clarity assessment and evaluation and really supporting the client in progressing forward.

Overall, I have found the pivot of COVID to be a tremendous learning experience. There have been, of course, the bumps and the burps and the hiccups along the way, but overall the progress has been phenomenal and I think that there's a real place for Zoom. I think there's a real place for being online and that there's a real opportunity for a connection that we've never thought possible but is possible even when it's through a Facebook Live when I can't even see people.

So, it's really outstanding to have this platform and to support people in such a chaotic and uncertain and crazy time. So, if you're considering making the move to Zoom, if you're considering making the move online or moreso online know that it is absolutely worth it. Initially it will feel a little different, a little bit weird, but we're all human, all humans craving connection, humans craving learning and there is a real place for this online world to flourish with you being in it.

If this episode has resonated with you and you see your future in the online world and you want to take your therapeutic applications to another level then join me in 2021 at The Therapeutic Yoga Intensive and you can find that at www.therapeuticyogaintensive.com.