



MUSIC TEACHERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Meet the Entrepreneur: Marie Lee
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TRANSCRIPT:

Hi, I'm Marie Lee, and I never wanted to be a piano teacher!

Fast forward 30 years and now I'm the owner of [Musicality Schools](#), a group piano school of over 100 students in Las Vegas, Nevada. We use group music classes to motivate and inspire musicians so they can enjoy a lifetime of creative and beautiful music making. Let me tell you a bit about our school.

What are key steps or experiences that helped guide me to where I am now?

I started as a young private teacher with a huge waitlist. I knew that I would most likely never get to these kids on my waitlist, and I felt badly. One day, one of my piano parents mentioned her sister was teaching group piano, and I should check it out. One look at the [Mayron Cole group piano method](#), and I knew this was the direction I needed to go—teaching more students and making more of an impact. To get a feel for this new teaching style, I started by arranging my private students into monthly group classes in addition to their private lessons, and the students enjoyed the variety. We soon moved into a larger home, which has space for multiple pianos, and I announced that I was converting to group classes. This was over 20 years ago, before group piano was accepted as a viable way to learn, and I lost 40% of my students, which was tough; but word quickly spread about this fun way of “learning piano with your friends,” and my student base started growing again.

In 2012, Philip Johnston's book [The Dynamic Studio](#), gave me a huge push to re-evaluate my school. I'd become stagnant and needed fresh ideas. I proceeded to overhaul my studio with oodles of his creative approaches. The response from my piano families was phenomenal! Now I was getting more referrals than ever before, teaching 80–90 students per year.

Using the help of business coaches [Leila Viss](#), [Becki Laurent](#) and [Debra Perez](#), I reached out to our local Steinway dealer about renting space and they happily agreed. It's a wonderful arrangement—they've given me a beautiful classroom inside their store, equipped with 8 Roland digital pianos.

Dear friend and coach, Leila Viss, also encouraged me to share with others what I'd learned, and I wrote my first book: [The Group Teaching Blueprint](#). We're also co-producing an online

conference specifically for Group Piano Teachers called [Group IlluminatED](#), now in its fourth season.

What could group piano look like in your studio?

Piano is a lonely “sport.” I’ve read that we piano teachers could learn something from marching bands, soccer and dance teams. Students that “play together, stay together.” There are huge benefits in having some kind of group offering in our music studios and it will definitely improve student retention.

Here are some ways that you could offer group experiences in your studio:

1. Convert to all group classes, just like I did.
2. One monthly group class + weekly private lessons (no private lessons on the week of group class).
3. Weekly private lessons + weekly group classes. (This would be the ideal, but few parents would be willing to pay that much, and few students are that committed or have that kind of time.)
4. 20/20/20 lessons with 3 students: each student receives a 20-minute private, 20 minute theory lab, and they come together for 20 minutes of ensemble playing.
5. Summer-only group classes.
6. Running a group music program in public or private schools or preschools.
7. Creating an additional ensemble performance team for your private students—make it really special—“by invitation only.” Have matching t-shirts and scheduled performances. This is your elite team!
8. I teach same-level classes, but many teachers are having success with a multi-level approach. Multi-level makes scheduling much easier, but it limits your curriculum choices. If you teach multi-level, use prewritten lesson plans and curriculum like Dorla Aparicio’s [Piano Pyramid](#).

For those of you that hope to follow a similar path, here are a few things that I’ve learned along the way:

- Ideas will “speak” to you—be sure that you’re “listening!”
- Create a mission statement that describes your philosophy and goals for your school: Ours is *Confidence building. Creative. Fun.*
- Hire a coach or two. You have to spend money to make money but the results will be well worth it.
- Take lots of photos to help with marketing. Parents just want to see happy kids making music.
- Continue learning. Read. Join Facebook group discussions. Attend conferences. The RMM track at the [MTNA National Conference](#) and [NCKP](#) have been particularly helpful for me.

- Join your local music teachers association, volunteer and participate in events with your students and network with other teachers.
- In addition to teaching music, maybe you have creative resources that you could sell to other teachers as a second source of income.

I'll be forever grateful for the path I've been led down. I wouldn't have ever imagined being the owner of a large piano school and teaching so many students to love music.

I am fulfilling my dream job!