

# One Piece of Advice for yoga teachers who want to

- ☞ improve their ability to teach
- ☞ connect with students
- ☞ make a difference

Compiled by

Susi Hatley Aldous

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## Introduction

In the years that I have been teaching yoga instructors principles of anatomy and yoga therapy, I have noticed a consistent theme amongst those who are attracted to what I offer. No matter how detailed we get about anatomical or therapeutic concepts, we always end up having philosophical conversations about what happens in “the space” between a teacher and a student; about improving various parts of our teaching; and about how we can reach those students who, in the moment, feel unreachable.

This is why I created “**One Piece of Advice**”. I wanted to draw from great yoga teachers who’ve been teaching for enough years to have insight on how we can make a difference, how we can improve our ability to teach, and how we can connect with students.

### **The Contributors to “One Piece of Advice”**

The teachers in this compilation come from a variety of styles, lineages, and experiences. Their ideas range from one-paragraph thoughts to four-page stories. If you find that you have a particular affinity to any of these contributors, I have included their contact information.

They include:

Seane Corn  
Margot Kitchen  
Jessica Robertson  
Wade Imre Morissette  
Lynn Houle  
Ted Grand  
Michael Ross  
Jai Uttal and Nubia Teixeira  
Leo Mowry  
Eoin Finn  
and me, Susi Hatley Aldous

I hope you enjoy the contributions and the message that we share.

Enjoy the read, Susi

# SUSI HATELY ALDOUS

## “Be real.”

The yoga environment is like no other – it’s both a place where students can drop their masks and sink into who they really are; and it’s a place where we teachers can tap into our essence and connect to that which is most vital. Between those two places exists a “space” – the element of our practice where the magic of yoga occurs – bodies unwind; minds unravel; breath permeates tissue; and centeredness, joy, and ease happen.

As the facilitators of the class, we have a great impact on how this space manifests. Some people call it “holding the space,” others “managing the energy.” Whatever you call it, the teachers who are able to do it with finesse are tapped in to the REALNESS of who and what they are.

When tapped into what is real, there is a natural flow. Not only is there an organic nature to the class, there is also a palpable sense that everyone who is in that room is truly there on purpose. There is an attractive quality to the situation that is almost irresistible.

## How to access this for yourself:

**Be real on the inside: Practice yoga.** Practice in the way that feels right to you. Close your eyes, come out of your head, and act out of what you sense to be right just for you. **Notice what is subtle.** Yoga has such great tools, including asana, pranayama, meditation, and yoga nidra, that help us tap into a subtle essence, to the whispers of the body, to the whispers of our souls. Listen for them, and have the courage to act. **Be real on the outside:** Flowing from the inside out, enjoy the realness of day to day – the chores, errands, ice cream, and chocolate - the things that drive you nuts and the things that make you belly laugh. Interact with them all.

Susi Hately Aldous

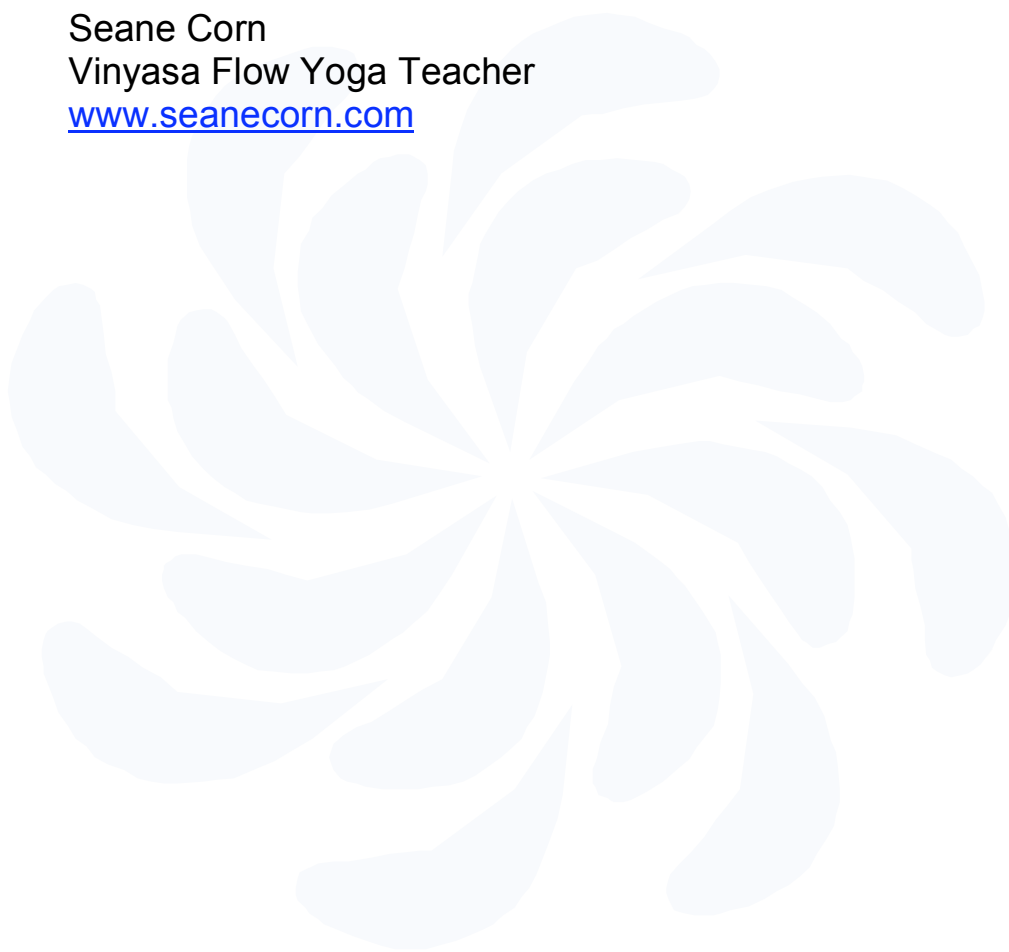
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## SEANE CORN

**“Be yourself, and have fun (really important).”**

This advice was given to me by a friend just before I left to teach my first yoga class many years ago. He wrote the words backwards on a piece of paper and had me stand in front of a mirror to read it. I could see my reflection as I recited the words out loud, and this small piece of advice touched something in me as I looked into my own eyes. I had been so scared to teach that day. I wanted it to be right. I wanted it to be good. After reading it, I made a sincere promise to my spirit to be my authentic self – no matter what. Not “right” or “good,” just real. It is a commitment that I stand by to this day.

Seane Corn  
Vinyasa Flow Yoga Teacher  
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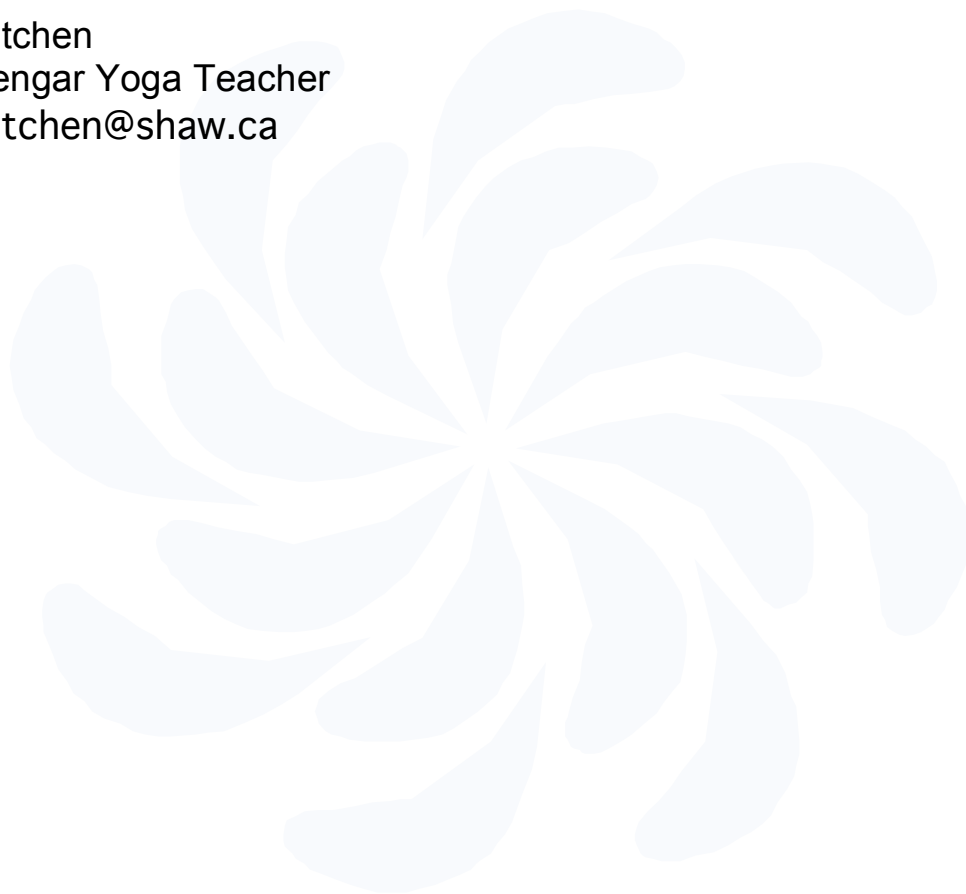


## MARGOT KITCHEN

**“Teach from experience.”**

My piece of advice is simple: Teach only what you know from experience and practice – following the kriya yoga of Patanjali – tapas, svadyaya, and ishvara pranidhana.

Margot Kitchen  
Senior Iyengar Yoga Teacher  
margotkitchen@shaw.ca



## JESSICA ROBERTSON

**“Dig, laugh, play, live, feel, breathe. . . .”**

Get your hands dirty working in the earth. Laugh at what you find funny, and hug the people you love. Play your favourite music and sing out loud. Do what *you* do to be joyful. Welcome the blues like a wise and beloved teacher. Look pain in the eye. Live your yoga. And when it is time to open the door to teach a class, be all that you are with a readiness to leave it all behind. Say to yourself, “This is not about me.” Teaching is facilitating, an archaeological dig to uncover the grace that resides within every student. So even if you feel empty, you can be a vessel to carry a class. Be yourself. Speak to students as you speak to friends; use the same voice. Your authenticity is the greatest gift you have to give. Have fun. And if you ever walk out of a class thinking *That was the worst yoga class in the vast history of yoga classes . . .* take a breath, smile at your humanity, and direct the compassion you give to students right back at yourself.

Jessica Robertson  
Moksha Yoga Teacher  
[www.mokshayoga.ca](http://www.mokshayoga.ca)

# WADE IMRE MORISSETTE

**“Connect to the source.”**

This is what I say to people when they are confused, worried for the future, fearful. . . . “When in fear, connect to the source and do nothing.”

Wade Imre Morissette  
Life of Dreams Productions Limited  
Bliss Dance, Kirtan, and Vinyasa Flow Yoga Teacher  
[www.wadeimremorissette.com](http://www.wadeimremorissette.com)

## LYNN HOULE

**“The role of yoga teacher is one of facilitator.”**

From my experience, the following are very important:

- Remember, it is the students’ class.
- Be flexible.
- Learn students’ first names – and use them.
- Teach only what you know to be true with every cell of your being.
- Listen.
- Observe.
- Pause – a lot!
- Use clear, concise verbal cues.
- Develop the skill of seeing with all your senses.
- Encourage and promote relaxation.
- Continue learning.
- Always leave ample time for relaxation and meditation.

I believe that one of the most important gifts of yoga is body–mind awareness. Thus, encourage students to feel more and think less. Develop simple warm-up sequences that allow students to find yoga in small moves. Enjoy watching the metamorphosis of each student.

Lynn Houle  
Restorative Yoga Teacher  
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## TED GRAND

### **“Practicing yoga is all day, every day.”**

Teaching yoga is a funny thing. We tend to think we gain most of our experience and knowledge from workshops, doing fancy poses, reading yoga books, and teaching lots of classes. Though all of those can and do play a part, the substance of our teaching comes from how we choose to live our lives.

Practicing yoga is all day, every day. It is watching our reactions to words, circumstances, and stories, then processing them in a manner that cultivates peace, strength, and integrity. This observing washes over all we do: Is this purchase necessary? How did this product get to this store? Was any creature or person harmed in its production? What is the ecological footprint of this product? The same process of observation can be incorporated into our interactions with others, with what we study, how we spend our spare time, and how we resolve conflict. This degree of mindfulness takes great skill, discipline, and years of practice, and it is easy to fall off the path and modify it to a point of greater ease or social acceptability. Let's face it, yogis and yoginis can be pretty boring at a cocktail party until they are up on the table busting out a perfect Flying Crow Pose for drunken onlookers. . . . The cool thing, however, is that when we choose to commit deeply to mindful living, we can then reap the greater rewards of gratitude, peace with things as they are, and of course an enhanced ability to share the wonders of yoga.

We are all living aspects of the greatest teachers of our traditions, and if we can reflect and refract the mindful and inspired ways in which they have lived, we will have succeeded in living and teaching yoga.

Ted Grand  
Moksha Yoga Teacher  
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## MICHAEL ROSS

### **“Tell stories.”**

“Why I Like Pets” is the title of the first speech I ever wrote (with a lot of help from my father). I was six years old and in grade one at a private girls’ school where boys (all four of us) were allowed to attend until grade four. Everyone wrote and delivered a speech for English class, and for some reason the teacher decided I had the best speech in the class.

I don’t actually remember that part, but I do remember what came next. The winner from each grade went on to the lower school public speaking championships, and I definitely remember getting up on stage in front of the entire lower school AND their parents. Possessed with nervous excitement, I blasted out my thoroughly memorized speech and received a warm round of applause. To my delight I was awarded a trophy, which I still see from time to time when I’m in my parents’ basement storage locker.

Looking back, I realize I learned some very important lessons from that experience that have served me well as a yoga teacher. One such lesson was that when you’re trying to get your point across, stories always work best. My speech was about my dog, and that led into more stories about why I liked pets. It was entertaining, funny, and short. Who wouldn’t like a speech like that coming from a six-year-old?

It wasn’t until much later that I realized this was a universal theme. While on a trip in India, a man saw I was reading a copy of the *Mahabharata*, and he asked me if I knew why Ganesha had an elephant’s head. In a flash, the gentleman went on to tell me it was so people would have more respect for the animals and also remember the stories better. I have to admit, it is pretty hard to forget a man with an elephant’s head. . . .

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This can also help when teaching various asanas. Using the names of the poses, such as Locust, Cobra, and Tortoise, can help the practitioner tap into the energy of each pose and bring true expression to the asana when he or she tries to take on its form.

Another thing the audience enjoyed about my speech was they could actually hear what I was saying. Standing up in front of a couple hundred people is pretty intimidating for most people, and I'm pretty sure my mother told me I was the only kid who could actually be heard all the way to the back of the room that day.

Creating the right mood in class is very important, and the volume and tone of your voice have a lot to do with it. When more energy is needed, raising your voice may help. A calm, quiet, and even voice can help when you're bringing the energy down.

One simple rule of thumb when speaking in class is to "praise from afar but correct from up close." In other words, as long as it's not too distracting, it's all right to let others hear the good stuff, but when corrections need to be made, it's time to lower your voice and speak only to the person who needs to hear what you have to say.

As you can see, many of the lessons I learned from my speech have carried on through my life, and yes, I still like pets, and I continue to learn from my dog every day.

Like most pet owners, I'm certain I have the cutest, smartest, and best pet in the world. Her name is Enki, and she was actually my girlfriend's dog first. What I'm about to tell you about Enki may give you the impression that she is a little spoiled. However, that doesn't even come close to the truth. Christina bought Enki from a pet store when she was just a very sickly, forlorn puppy. She was so small, Christina could carry her around inside her coat pocket. She's since graduated to a backpack, but she still gets at least an hour of belly rubs EVERY DAY from her mom.

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It's amazing to watch, actually. Total bliss. Enki lies flat on her back with all four paws in the air, and Christina is wholly absorbed in her role as belly rubber.

Pets take us out of ourselves the moment we shift our energy towards them, and great yoga teachers operate in the same way. When teachers aim to be of service to others, they get out of their daily personal dramas and focus on the needs of their students in the present moment. They are no longer operating for the sake of themselves but for others.

Consequently, they become acutely aware of the energy around them, recognizing when students need helpful encouragement or room to simply explore their edges on their own. Time dissolves, and one breath leads to the next while one pose leads to the next with effortless effort.

But now, back to Enki (which was also the name of the Sumerian god of wisdom). Whenever Christina went to yoga class, she brought Enki with her and would place her on a blanket beside her mat while she did her practice. Enki just lay there on the blanket, soaking up the yoga vibes while in deep meditation, until she heard the final chant of "Om Shanti." Knowing that Christina was finished, she'd get up, do a Downward Dog followed by an Upward Dog, and be ready to roll. Enki often teaches by example. . . .

Enki lives totally in the moment. She can go from a perfect Savasana (Corpse Pose) to a fully alert Samanghrika (like Tadasana, or standing at attention, but on all four feet) in the time it takes to say, "Do you want a treat?" What is, is. One moment she's asleep, and the next she's awake.

She's also always happy to see me when I walk in the door of our home. It doesn't matter whether I've been gone for five minutes or five days, she's there excitedly wagging her tail and ready to greet me with a kiss. The lesson here? Well, I wouldn't recommend kissing each of your students as they enter the room, but saying hello to familiar faces and getting to know new students goes a long way. It's about caring, and when you care . . .

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... the rest just follows.

Enki is a very quiet, Buddha-like dog. She communicates mostly through looks and gestures, and as long as I observe her very closely, she usually gets her point across pretty well. If she needs water, she'll look towards the sink. If she desperately wants some of what I'm eating, she'll paw me. Very rarely will students speak up in class, so teachers develop highly sensitive powers of observation that they use to detect when students need assistance, prefer to be left alone, or simply require clarification. When Enki really wants me to lift her up onto the bed, she has that same look that students give me when they're desperate for a spot in a challenging pose. When you're present and focused, it's obvious.

She is also a very good listener. When I'm talking to her, she tilts her head slightly from side to side to show me that she's paying attention, and when I'm talking too much, she gets that same glassy look in her eyes that students get if I go on for too long. "Keep it simple" is always a good rule to follow in class and in life.

Our greatest teachers in life often appear when we least expect them to. They take different forms and sometimes communicate in unusual ways, but they always seem to find a way to connect us to the present moment and to our true selves.

“... and that's why I like pets.”

Michael Ross  
Vinyasa Flow Yoga Teacher  
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## JAI UTTAL and NUBIA TEIXEIRA

**“Remember how little we actually know.”**

If there is anything we can recommend to teachers, new and old, it's to please remember how little we actually know. The teachings of yoga are ancient and vast. Even the most advanced of us have just gotten our toes wet. We ask the Universe Spirit to teach us and guide us all together through the vehicle of our hearts. "Teacher" and "student" are just roles in the sweet play of human life. The truth has many forms and many faces. The sweet song of God has many melodies.

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Musician, Bhakti Yoga, Pranayama, and Dance Teachers  
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## LEO MOWRY

**“Be present, find your voice, and maintain your humility.”**

As a new teacher, I was so aware of everything I didn't know. I felt humbled by the prospect of teaching and, frankly, pretty intimidated! As I developed as a teacher, my own style began to emerge. Instead of regurgitating what I had learned in classes, from books, and in my first teacher training, I started to find my voice. I gradually found the courage to just be who I am with my students, infusing my classes with humour, spontaneity, and practical lessons learned from my long-time study of Eastern philosophy. The more I share of myself, the more positively the students respond, and the more impassioned they become with their own practice and development.

Having studied Taoism for 12 years and yoga for 10, I still feel like a child on my path of growth and discovery. There is still so much to learn! But some of the first lessons these philosophies taught me have proven to be the most relevant, not only in my life but also as a teacher. Be in the moment, be who you are, and just when you think you know everything . . . humbly think again.

Leo Mowry  
Therapeutic Yoga Teacher  
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## EONIN FINN

### “Be confident.”


Artists and yoga teachers alike wear their hearts on their sleeves. Every class we teach is such a profound offering – of course we want people to like what we are sharing. When we feel that people are not getting our vibe, it is so easy to become deflated and filled with self-doubt.

Here are two major reasons why you should teach with full confidence:

*You are teaching only what you enjoy.* Have you ever noticed that how you practice is how you teach? For example, on a day when you move in a slow and detailed way in your own practice, that is the way you teach that day. Think of what you are doing more as *sharing* than as teaching. When you lead your classes, just remind yourself, “This is what I love, this is the way I love doing it, and if it is good for me, a lot of other people will enjoy it too. . . .”

Second, when I am teaching well, it feels as if it is not even me doing what I am doing. As yoga teachers, we just need to open ourselves up to *become a conduit so the energy of love and happiness can flow through us.* People will be connecting this way for years after we are all gone. A new generation will be sharing love with each other in a new way. Love is so powerful. Feel it. Right in your chest and radiating out of every pore. It is far more powerful than any of us, and when you realize that, you can be confident that your teaching is going to make a significant positive impact on people’s lives. It is one of life’s greatest gifts.

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I hope you have enjoyed the read,  
and that you have ideas to incorporate  
into your practice as a teacher.

All the best,

Susi