

THE BAD REVIEW

Winter was coming and the pervasive cold that gets down to your bones and I knew I needed some heat. I called the studio and was told by a man in a rather condescending tone that they do not offer free classes to first-time visitors. That's odd, I thought. I've practiced yoga for over 10 years, visiting just about every studio in the area, as well as numerous studios downtown and in foreign countries, and every single one of them has offered a free class to first-timers. Anyways, it wasn't a deal-breaker for me and I went to the studio later that night. I paid, with tax, \$24.86 for the one class.

A few weeks later, at the beginning of November, I returned to the studio to purchase a monthly membership. When I purchased the membership there were two people present – the owner and a girl working the front desk. This is more or less what I was told about the membership: **This is a monthly auto-renew membership. You must purchase 2 months minimum. You can cancel your membership at any time after these two months are up. If you would like to cancel your auto-renew membership, you must notify the studio at the start of the month prior to the month you would like to cancel for. So, if you would like to stop coming in March for example, you must notify us at the start of February.** I was even told that *if I was a few days late in notifying the studio we could still work things out*. This last line was told to me by the girl in the presence of the owner. A few weeks later, she had quit (foreshadowing intensifies).

I paid for November and December to satisfy the 2-month minimum requirement and attended classes there for the remainder of the month.

In late November I decided that I'd be going away for an extended period of time at the start of 2020. With this in mind I went to the studio on December 1st in order to attend a class and to cancel my membership for January. When I arrived at the studio there was a teacher at the front desk who I had never seen before who told me to sign in for class on paper because she didn't know how to operate the system. Seeing that I wouldn't be able to cancel that night, I returned on December 2nd, once again to attend a class and to cancel my membership. After class, I went to the front desk and asked the teacher if he could open up my file but he told me that he did not have access to the system. Seeing that coming into the studio was not getting me anywhere, and noticing that I had already been charged the \$99.44 for the month of January by this time, I called the studio on the morning of December 3rd expressing my desire to cancel my membership. The girl who answered the phone told me she would get in contact with the owner to let him know. I went into the studio that evening to attend a class and finalize the cancellation, but the girl who I spoke to earlier on the phone told me that I could only put my membership on hold for January, using the payment instead for the month of February, and that it was impossible to refund me for January. According to the owner, she said, "The system does not allow us to do refunds".

Of course, I thought this was silly for several reasons. One being that I had never asked nor expressed interest in putting my membership on hold. The second being that I know, from my own experience with business but more importantly from common sense, that it is entirely possible to refund someone. Sometimes a refund is not possible because of a change in price or a stock issue or

because of a particular policy, but nothing had changed in the price of the membership and I was following the policy related to me when I had first signed up. Of course, this gave me the impression that this was some juvenile tactic to coerce people into paying for months that they did not want by hiding behind 'technical issues' and hoping that nothing be said. I asked the girl to please ask the owner to call me when he had a chance. She said OK and thanked me for my patience.

Over the course of the next day I received several text messages from the owner in the vein of 'You are not getting your refund, end of story'. I replied, via text, that I had followed the instructions given to me upon purchase of my membership to a T, that I had no interest in putting my membership on hold because I did not know if I would even be back for February, and that I knew it was entirely possible to refund me, even if the owner had to send me an e-transfer outside of the confines of his delicate 'system'.

I had multiple missed calls from him the following morning. I also received some texts with an overtly aggressive tone. When I responded, he called me, hung up on me, and called me back only to hang up on me once again. At this point I wasn't sure if I was asking for a refund or having a bad breakup.

This is how the conversation went. He attempted to confuse me on the matter in multiple ways. His first tactic was to tell me that the payment that had just gone through was actually for the month of December, and not for January (It was not. The payment was for January. As mentioned earlier, I had paid for November and December at the start to fulfill the 2-month minimum requirement). When I told him this, the owner then told me that I hadn't in fact paid for November and December, but that I had paid for November 2019 and November 2020, insinuating, I suppose, that this was a yearly membership (It was not. This was a month-to-month auto renewal membership. I could have stayed on this plan for 6 months or 3 years). When I told him this, he responded by telling me he had refunded me for December when I first came in to pay, and so this recent payment was covering that refund (It was not. I had my credit statement open on my laptop in front of me and had never received a refund from him before). I told him I'd be happy to share these documents with him. At this point I could hear a deep and disconcerting grumbling emanating from the other end of the line.

Seeing that he wasn't getting anywhere on this tact the owner tried his hand at a new form of subterfuge, claiming that I had to cancel my membership via email. He told me we must play by the rules, that these were the rules, and that he was just following them. By rules I suppose he meant whatever rules he wanted to create at the moment to suit his needs, because none of these 'rules' were ever relayed to me. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, I was told I could come in, *even a few days late*, to cancel my membership. He started going on about a sentence in the email receipt that states I must cancel my membership via email. By the shaky uncertainty in his voice and the countless 'Err's', 'Ahh's' and 'Uhm's' interjected between every other word I got the impression that he was coming up with this 'email sentence' on the spot. I asked him to wait on the line for a second while I loaded my emails. He was resistant, telling me he had to go and that he had wasted enough time with my trivialities and small-mindedness already, but I quickly had the email loaded and looking through it (it is very short) saw nothing even resembling what he had just told me.

This might have been when he hung up on me for the first time. It is also more or less the time when his voice went from agitated and rude to downright appalling. When he called me back, a few seconds later, he began telling me that he would not refund me because of the way I was acting. "You're crazy, you're out of your mind" he told me. "Stop and take a minute and think about what you're doing" was his advice to me. At this point he had decided to abandon any façade of decency and began calling me an "idiot" repeatedly, shelling the word out with almost joyful glee. At one point he seemed to put the phone down on the table and had me wait on the line in absolute silence for about half a minute. I assume he was busy adjusting whatever it was that was stuck up his ass.

Finally, done with his cavity search, he got back on the line and told me that he would be refunding me, but only because I was such a "pain in the ass". He proceeded to call me an idiot once again, and when I asked him what he had just said, not thinking he could be serious, his response was "You heard me".

He then told me that he never wanted to see me in his studio again. I told him that I'd be happy to oblige him, but seeing as how I had already paid for December, and it was only December 5th, he'd have to refund me for December as well. "All right, come until the end of the month, but then never again!" I guess not seeing me wasn't worth losing the hundred bucks. I don't know if I should take that as a compliment or not...

I had heard disquieting rumours about the owner of the studio prior to this incident and following it found many negative reviews online as well. I will not share what I heard or read here, but suffice it to say, these rumours were so akin to and in line with my own experience that I must conclude that this sort of exchange was not a one-time event, but in fact is a reoccurring issue with the man.

I have nothing bad to say about the teachers or the studio itself. In fact, the teachers were experienced and professional, the staff was helpful, and the facilities had clearly been designed with an eye towards the aesthetic. The only issue is with the owner of this studio. And because of this issue, I cannot recommend this studio to anyone.

In summary, it was an upsetting experience, not only because I felt that the man was trying to scam me (I did end up being refunded), but because this incident occurred with someone who purports to be a yogi. Truth be told I am not that surprised, because experience has taught me that it doesn't take a great yogi to run a successful yoga studio, it takes a business man. Unfortunately, this man is clearly neither a yogi nor a very good business man. In fact, I'm not sure how a man who treats his clients like this can expect to be in business for much longer.