

What does that mean?

Yesterday, after Pilates class, I was chatting with another student for a couple minutes as we gathered our stuff. In the background, I heard a bell ringing. I noticed it but didn't know what it meant. We kept on chatting. The bell rang again. Again, no idea what it was. Then, one of the instructors tapped me on the shoulder and said we were being too loud, to please leave, and that the bell means be quiet. I turned to her, and after apologizing (#sorrynotsorry), told her that I had absolutely no idea what her ringing bell meant. Neither did the other student. We went outside, feeling a bit peeved.

In my experience, a ringing bell indicates something is starting or ending. In yoga classes, teachers often ring a bell to indicate final relaxation is over. I do not associate a ringing bell with the need to be quiet.

I've been going to this Pilates studio for several weeks. Not once has my instructor ever rung a bell, even when there have been other people chatting. There's no sign indicating that you need to be quiet or that a bell will be rung if you're not. There's nothing about it on the studio website. In fact, this is the only instruction regarding behavior:

Protocol

Clients must sign-in at the Front Desk upon arrival. Please remove your shoes and silence your cell phone upon entering the studio. Pets are not allowed. For your safety, clients who arrive more than 10 minutes late to a group class will not be permitted to join the class.

This studio is quite small and there's no separate waiting area. It's one big room. If noise is a problem (and mind you, Pilates, unlike yoga, lacks a meditative/spiritual aspect), you need to remind students to be quiet. You could put up a

sign saying something like: please, no talking or cell phone use (or whatever else).

We all understand what this means, right?:



That's because some symbols/signals are universal.

Here's the thing: if you are going to use a symbol or signal that is not universally understood to mean what you intend it to, you will have to define it and educate people about what it means.

If you want to communicate clearly, you cannot make assumptions. You'll have to keep in mind that other people have different experiences and understanding than you.