

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

By Todd Fiorentino, LMT

I was putting together contracts to do massage therapy for B&B's, inns and resorts so I decided to call a teacher I used to work with to see if she might help out. She responded that she was pursuing the field of injury prevention -- which I know very little about -- and that she didn't have time. This got me thinking... of course there is a relationship. Most therapists would agree that we are doing prevention work especially when performing wellness or sports massage. But there's more to it than that.

I used to take those personality and aptitude tests that HR professionals and school counselors give to assess weaknesses/strengths, see what I might be good at and gain insight into my personality. At various times in my life, I tested differently. One year, I remember testing as a "Guardian" (some of the tests give you a descriptive archetype on the results page). This was interesting because it was a more conservative type than past tests.

Life events can certainly alter the outcome of these tests: Getting married, having children, a death in the family—any number of things can change your outlook on life and therefore your personality. But I also see this as an early indicator that I might become a therapist. We are forever trying to protect and save things. It's a natural reaction to change and loss. In our case, we are trying to protect and guard our clients to an extent, which can become complicated at times.

I remember getting out of a job interview once in Trenton, NJ and experiencing terrible pain in my upper back as I was walking to the car. Remarkably, I believe that my body was actually telling me that this is not the right job for you—this is not your calling. Listening to your body and adjusting, changing habits, adapting to stress, taking a softer look at life, opening your heart... these are hard lessons to learn.

Some therapists get into this line of work because they are trying to understand themselves, need a connection with others, have experienced trauma themselves or want a new way of healing. By helping others, you can heal yourself. One could call this enlightened self interest, or perhaps it's just a desire for others to not have to go through what you did. Improper medical interventions, aggressive procedures, chemicals, surgeries and so on can all leave their mark on the soul.

Although certainly an over-generalization, it is true that in the East, if a patient presents with lethargy and muscular pain, the physician may recommend herbs, deep tissue massage, acupuncture or some combination of the three. Here this is still often considered "alternative." I asked a recent client about neurological signs (burning, tingling, electrical sensation) and she responded, "Yes, I do have those sometimes in the hands and feet." But I then had to consider whether these might be side effects of her medications or drug interactions, as opposed to nerve entrapment, as she was on four different drugs.

So the picture gets muddled quickly in massage therapy. Why are we doing this? What are our own true motives? How does this fit our self concept? Is part of the therapy just letting people be heard? How does past experience filter into the therapeutic relationship and treatment? What causes us to wake up from our daze and really start experiencing life? Are we reading the signs? Do we understand our selves well enough, our own motivations, to deliver a service that is 100% for the client? Have you noticed the changes within yourself?

Todd Fiorentino owns Energy Rising Massage Therapy (www.energyrising.net) in Pittsfield, MA. He has been a therapist for six years, three of which he spent teaching massage on a full-time basis.