



BRINGING INTRINSIC COACHING® INTO MASSAGE THERAPY

Applying Intrinsic Coaching® principles in my life and in my practice as a massage therapist has been transformational in many ways.

Choosing to regard my clients as capable, creative, and complete was initially one of the most difficult but powerful mindset changes for me. This is particularly important for me because as massage therapists we are not licensed health practitioners and by law we are not allowed to diagnose patients. Given this fact, and the fact that our field is highly intimate and intuitive in nature, we are positioned well to rely on other more effective and intuitive ways to work with clients to facilitate therapeutic changes than on the more traditional diagnostic or problem based methods.

By using the Intrinsic Coaching® approach of “serving” the client versus “helping” or “fixing” and not being diagnostic, I have been able to be fully compliant with the state laws of Minnesota while achieving better results by incorporating the client in a collaborative healing process - tapping into their own resources rather than just relying on mine.

I have been surprised to learn so much can be revealed by a client through non verbal and energetic cues during a massage treatment session. And through the simple process of quieting my mind to listen very actively, I am better tapping into my own intuitive healing resource at the same time.

I learned that a client’s attitude toward healing and the way they view their own state of health or capacity for healing plays a huge role in their progress. One very frustrated client came into the clinic complaining of abdominal and chronic bladder pain which she had been experiencing for the past 5 years. She had seen several specialists and felt she was at a “dead end with no one to help.”

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My pre-coaching intake process was to have the client rate the pain and to make several suggestions about work that could be done. Having experienced similar chronic bladder pain, I immediately identified with the client and began telling her about my experiences with bladder pain and MY own healing process. I later realized that this was not at all “coach-like” or productive. I also saw my own pattern of “prescriptive” and diagnostic behavior with my friends and family as well. I began to see that I had been so quick to give advice based on my own experiences and health expertise.

This same client came in the following week which gave me an opportunity to change my whole intake approach. I began asking her “want” questions which were much more thought provoking and allowed her to participate fully in the decision on treatment course. I refrained from identifying with her (self management), making assumptions, and rephrasing her sentences, and made the session completely about her – tuning into her intently. It immediately seemed that with very little effort, I established a different and much stronger level of trust and rapport with her and she returned to me each week, requesting me as a therapist.

We saw steady progress with me using abdominal and pelvic massage techniques having her work in synch with me to release areas of tension and to deepen her breathing. She ultimately decided, after I asked her “want” questions, that she wanted me teach her self massage techniques during the treatment session. She was a very happy client and I was very pleased to see this result.

As my capabilities as an Intrinsic Coach® grew, I began relying less and less on previous client experiences and assumptions for treatment planning and decisions, for example, “I was able to fix his tight traps with this stroke, so I will try it on this next client...”. I realized that I regularly and systematically categorized people into “pain categories” and often made over generalized and inaccurate assumptions about their pain and how best to treat them. Really listening to clients, both during the intake and observing them more intently throughout the treatment session, had a huge impact on my ability to affect my clients (and myself) in a more positive way.

I started to recognize that I was able to elicit new thinking and I learned how to recognize it clearly (the silence that preceded it) and cherish it. I noticed that clients would often refer to some sort of change process that had occurred in between the sessions and I realized that I was playing an active role with them in their healing. This was really exciting.

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I also realized that if I let go of my focus on technique, and really allowed each step to inform the next, I was much more “tuned in” to the client and could sense even the slightest shift in energy. I began to rely more on listening and really tuning into clients. It almost seemed that my technique and skill set was insignificant compared to the simple process of tapping into the client properly.

One of the biggest challenges at a student-run health clinic, where I am working, is how to serve as many of the growing number of clients that have massage needs as possible, within the limited time frame we have, typically 15-20 minutes. Incorporating Intrinsic Coaching® techniques, including rewording the intake process questions to be more coach-like, has allowed me to work with clients more effectively in this short period of time and built an important level of trust during the first visit.

A trap I had fallen into as a massage therapist was to assume that I can “fix” everyone and have some magical power to do so. Clients often believe this and it further encourages this egocentric thinking. This immediately created an unhealthy power balance that my instructors in massage are always

warning against. I found myself being more concerned about what unique stroke I could perform to get a client “hooked” and strategizing in my head about what to do next during the treatment. When I began worrying less about my own skills and technique and allowed the results of one stroke to inform the next with less pre-planning, I immediately felt more connected to clients and saw better results. In the end, the client is happy and books a return visit. Sometimes I can’t honestly explain why, but they return and I feel the connection.

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Choosing to see all clients – no matter how broken down they are or no matter how much pain they are suffering – as capable, creative and complete also allowed me to tap into my client’s resources better. This has helped me to avoid the kind of co-dependent relationships that are potentially unhealthy for both me and my clients.

Another important thing about myself that I am now managing is my tendency to steer people according to answers that I have in mind. I also finish sentences for people often. I find myself wanting to start sentences with “so then you would like....” Typically I would do this without even listening to what the client or customer had to say because I was convinced I had a better way to state it and that I understood exactly what they wanted AND how to say it. I discovered that even my desire to “help” or “heal” people was and is still often self serving and egocentric in many ways. I was then able to see how I often missed important information while making assumptions and maintaining a certain power and direction over clients and client intake conversations. My business background in particular has conditioned me to always be in control and have a certain power over my clients; this is absolutely not productive in my newly chosen career as a health practitioner.

In summary, my experience applying Intrinsic Coaching® techniques with my massage therapy clients in a clinic setting has led me to important realizations about myself and about my massage therapy practice. These realizations and my ability to self manage and recognize clients as capable, creative, and complete have led to powerful therapeutic results, a great deal of growth and self awareness on my part, and a much more enjoyable work experience for me overall.

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