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## **Are You Sitting on a 24-Karat Gold Mine?**

By Colleen (Steigerwald) Holloway, LMT

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*Author's note:* It is my pleasure to share the knowledge I've acquired with my colleagues and friends within the context of this column. My goal is to assist massage therapists in practicing massage professionally, ethically, efficiently and profitably.

If there are any issues you would like me to address, I would love to hear from you.

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If you have been in business for one or more years, it's quite possible that you are sitting on a 24-karat gold mine! Let me explain what I mean. Nearly every day, I speak with a frustrated massage therapist who has been in the business for many years and still can't fill his or her appointment book. Given the various choices of marketing, it can be "hit or miss" when you choose to spend your hard-earned dollars on advertising. But what if you could spend very few dollars and still fill your schedule, simply by tapping into that gold mine?

Many massage therapists say their biggest challenge is getting new clients. Once clients come in, they are sold on the treatment and continue as dedicated clients for many years. The problem, as you know, is that new clients who don't know you are hesitant to trust you - and understandably so, considering they will be nearly naked (but properly draped), while allowing a stranger to touch them. Your job, therefore, is to convince them that you are trustworthy and professional.

This task can take a lot of time, proper marketing and advertising dollars. Some therapists would argue that the best way to fill their appointment books is through word-of-mouth referrals. After all, new clients who are referred to you are much more likely to trust you even though they don't know you, just because someone they trust referred them. I agree: This is a good and inexpensive way to get clients; however, it's not the gold mine to which I'm referring. There are actually people out there who trust you even more than

those referred clients: your inactive clients. The clients who have visited you one or more times throughout your career are the seeds to your 24-karat gold mine. Remember, the inactive client already trusts you because he or she has a pre-existing relationship with you. Your only challenge is to get the inactive clients back into your practice.

What can be scary is that you don't know why those clients stopped coming to you. Did they relocate? Did they find another therapist? Maybe they simply fell out of the rhythm of regular massage? The reason doesn't matter - chances are good that they would come back to you if asked. How do you reactivate these clients? That's fairly simple: You send them an invitation! Here are some tips for writing an effective invitational letter:

- Make your letter as personalized as possible so it doesn't appear that everyone is receiving a form letter. A handwritten letter takes longer, but is optimal.
- When addressing the envelopes, avoid using labels; type or print each address.
- Tell your clients you care about them and/or that you miss them (if appropriate).
- Explain briefly how massage will benefit them. Refer to an old injury or ailment for which they previously sought treatment.
- Offer a special incentive to entice them to call. (Examples: a 60-minute massage for the price of a 30-minute massage, or two massages for the price of one so the client schedules two massages in a row, which gets them back into a regular massage schedule.)
- Give a deadline for the incentive so they will act right away; I suggest 10-14 days from the date of the letter.

If you've been in the field for several years, you'll surely have hundreds of inactive clients. Instead of attempting to write everyone at once, you will want to make this a marketing "project." In this case, I recommend making a list of the clients you have not seen in a while, and even those you only saw once. Set aside two hours per week to prepare the letters and send them out. Continue this until all of your inactive clients have received a letter. Monetarily, it will cost you a mere \$37 in postage for every 100 inactive clients you reach. Inactive clients already know and trust you.

Start tapping into that 24-karat gold mine and before you know it, your appointment book will be overflowing.

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