

[IMAGE]

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## **What Employers Are Saying**

Recent research indicates that the number one complaint of employers is the inability of massage therapists to market themselves. The term *marketing* sounds very broad and it is.

It encompasses written marketing materials, introductions, client relations and public relations. However, employers not only are talking about marketing yourself, but also marketing the profession of massage therapy, overall health and the cumulative benefits of massage.

In all my years of teaching and consulting, this complaint still is at the top of the list. I regularly consult with business owners and talk with them about their needs. They often want to know how to better motivate their staff and get them to help with marketing. Why is this so hard? Why does the staff not get involved or why do they think it falls completely on the business owner's shoulders? I think most massage therapists think if they work for someone else, all the marketing is done for them. However, this is not the case and you will be a more valuable worker (whether employee or independent contractor) if you participate in the marketing.

Whether you choose to be self-employed or opt to work for someone else, a certain amount of marketing falls on you. After all, isn't it your responsibility to get the client to reschedule? Aren't you somewhat responsible to educate the client about how massage therapy can help them? It might be a receptionist in the waiting area asking a client if they want to reschedule, but it's the therapist that has to plant that seed during the exit interview. If you really believe massage has cumulative benefits, it's up to you to introduce that concept to your clients. I have found that most clients just don't know any better. They need to have it suggested that a return visit would be beneficial to their health. That suggestion needs to come from their trusted massage therapist, not a receptionist.

Speaking as a former owner of a wellness center, I think it's imperative for therapists to be comfortable marketing what we do, how it affects people and what role massage plays in healthcare. Many hours of my staff time were spent drilling therapists on the dialogue to use when educating clients. The reasons were two-fold. I needed my therapists to reschedule clients and build the business, but I also wanted to make sure

the clients were receiving the best care and the right information. I relied heavily on my therapists to handle this aspect of the business. Most employers feel the same way. Most of my staff found it awkward at first. But when their schedules starting filling up and they had happy, repeat clients, they thanked me for the push. Most of my staff even commented that it became easier over time and now was a part of their normal exit interview.

Now as an educator, I tell my students about marketing and how employers are not happy with the level that now exists. This usually starts quite a debate. The students argument is, "if we are hired to sell, we should be paid more" or "by going to work for someone else, the responsibility of marketing should fall solely on the employer." The reality is that nothing could be further from the truth. Sure, the written marketing and the publicity might fall on the business owner, but the other elements of marketing fall on the therapist. However, if you want to take that stand, perhaps you are better suited for private practice.

To be truly successful in this field, you have to sell it. The word "sell" is so loaded and comes with such negative connotation. I hate to even use it, but isn't that what we do? We sell massage. Use whatever verb you want, but it's all the same thing. If you are not comfortable doing this, I suggest you role play and practice with a friend. If you are self-employed and clients are not coming back for regular care, ask yourself if you are educating and dialoguing thoroughly during your exit interview. If you work for someone else and are not getting the repeat business, talk to the business owner about how to better prepare your dialogue to improve retention. This isn't a perfect science and it takes some practice, but it's something that can be improved. After all, don't you want to see all of your clients incorporate massage into their healthcare practice?

I guess a certain amount of my frustration is because of the passion I feel for this work. It's hard for me NOT to sell it. Massage is something I believe in with every fiber of my being and I find it easy and exciting to talk about. I have been a client of massage for many years, so I truly believe in the benefits. Get me going and I am hard to stop. So why do therapists still struggle when talking about massage therapy and its benefits? Why do therapists reject marketing the profession and refrain from telling clients about its cumulative effects? Ask them to reschedule? Perhaps they are not convinced themselves. Ask yourself, when was your last massage? Do you really believe in what you do? If you can't remember your last massage, book one today! If you receive care regularly, you should know how good it feels and you should want everyone to feel the same way. You have to believe in what you do to market it successfully.

The bottom line is that no matter what your working venue, it's up to you as the therapist to promote this work. You alone are in the room with the client. The client looks to you for information and holds you in a position of authority in this matter. For the forward progress of the profession, for the benefit of keeping clients educated and for the sake of business, talk it up. Tell people how great it is. Suggest they reschedule to receive added benefits, and believe it when you say it. Your sincerity will be apparent, business will blossom and your schedule will be full.

Stay focused.



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