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Working Together

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"The red tail hawk writes songs across the sky; there's music in the waters flowing by. And you can hear a song each time the wind sighs; in the golden rolling hills of California."

- *Kate Wolf*⁷

In the last two years, as September moved into October, the weekend closest to the full moon brought a rush of activity for me.

On each of those weekends, a dozen of us joined together, along with about 300 other teams of 12 participants, to run a 199-mile relay through the golden, rolling hills of California, from Calistoga to Santa Cruz. The progress of individual runs, runners, and supporting minivans moving from day into night, then into dawn, and finally finishing in late afternoon, was memorable. However, my strongest impressions come from the teamwork and small kindnesses we provided to each other, even when physically fatigued and desperately short of sleep. It is the thoughts and feelings provoked by this surrounding sense of team support that I want to share as we move into a new year.

The practice and profession of massage are interpersonal on many levels. In working with clients, we optimally become a team, facilitating improvements in their physical well-being. From a larger perspective, we become part of our clients' social context of emotional and life support that each of us optimally creates around us. In return, we have the wonders of connection with others, and a feeling that our life and work makes a discernable human difference. Within the profession, we share webs of connection as colleagues, teachers and co-creators of organizations.

In an article on "partnering with your customer," business writer Tracey Lowrance starts with a time-tested quote that underscores the importance of having a purpose, and a way of accomplishing it.

"A vision without a task is a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. A vision and a task is the hope of the world."

- *Inscription on the wall of a church in Sussex, England, 1730*

Lowrance distills this synergy of vision and task down to having a "mutually understood and collectively honored shared purpose and customer candor."³ It is the sense of working toward a common goal, and of being able to mutually share and listen, that reinforces the relationship. In the context of teaching teamwork to children, Bellingham public schools have captured this juxtaposition of goals and interactions in a teamwork skills list that includes listening, questioning, persuading, respecting, helping, sharing, and participating.¹ It's interesting to note that "respecting" has both a geometrically central position in the Bellingham list and a central position in my own thoughts of places to start for building teamwork.

M. Scott Peck shares a story of a dying monastery revived by a change in attitude, one that caused the monks to display extraordinary respect to each other and to themselves.⁵

"Because the forest in which it was situated was beautiful, it so happened that people still occasionally came to visit the monastery to picnic on its tiny lawn, to wander along some of its paths, even now and then to go into the dilapidated chapel to meditate. As they did so, without even being conscious of it, they sensed this aura of extraordinary respect that now began to surround the five old monks and seemed to radiate out from them and permeate the atmosphere of the place. There was something strangely attractive, even compelling, about it. Hardly knowing why, they began to come back to the monastery more frequently to picnic, to play, to pray. They began to bring their friends to show them this special place. And their friends brought their friends."

This attitude of respect, I believe, is one we should cultivate in our own interactions with fellow students, massage practitioners, and anyone who might learn from our knowledge and experience - especially those whose background and goals differ from our own.

As we enter massage school, our attitude and actions should convey respect for the school and our fellow students. In return, we should expect the school to respect our time, effort and money in its actions and attitudes. As we grow to practice and teach, we should renew our attitude of respect for our clients and students, including the expectation that they act to warrant our respect. One of the best teachers I know has both a gentle heart and a crystal-clear projection of her expectations for class behavior. Sometimes, her

respect is shown in strongly reminding her students that they must learn and work together to succeed.

As we progress in our practices from novices to journeymen to masters, we necessarily interact with the staff and boards of various massage-related organizations. Again, whether as customers or constituency, we have the right to be insistent in our expectations for respect and service. Too often, the leaders of organizations need our prodding to remind them to foster a service-oriented culture from top to bottom.^{4,6} As Tracey Lowrance suggests, teamwork sometimes requires hard candor to reach the mutual rewards beyond.

As I ran uphill on the moonlit road last October, it was ultimately my respect for the support and caring of my teammates that maintained my pace and breathing at a level that left my ribs sore the following day. There were no demands or disappointments in the way each of us ran; only the continuing expectation among us that we each would excel in our own way, and in the way that we supported each other. This is the essence of working together.

"While ideas are conceived in individual minds, they are seldom born in isolation and rarely realized alone."

- Jerry Hirshberg²

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(www.katewolf.com).

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