

ten for today

BY LIZ PRATO

MT STRAIGHT TALK

1 CLIENTS KNOW MORE THAN YOU DO

Even if they don't know the name, origin, insertion, and action of every—or any—muscle, even if they don't have one clue about physiology or kinesiology or any other *ology* you're trained in, clients still live in their bodies every single day. Don't try to push them through something they don't want. Help them get in touch with and listen to their own bodies, and then listen to them. Your clients trust you enough to place their bodies in your hands. Treat this gift with loving respect.

2 CLIENTS WILL TELL YOU THINGS YOU WISH YOU DIDN'T KNOW

The intimacy of the massage environment means clients tell you stories not fit for dinner table conversation. These stories often involve confessing their addictions. There will also be stories they don't tell you, but you witness: the bruises left on their backs or thighs by someone they'll never name. You can't fix this, so say a loving prayer over them and move on.

3 CLIENTS WILL TELL YOU THINGS YOU FEEL HONORED TO KNOW

They will tell you about surviving cancer. They will tell you about the death of their lover. They will tell you about struggling to overcome an addiction. They will tell you about falling in love. They will tell you about falling out of love. These are their secrets. Honor them.

4 CLIENTS WILL PASS GAS

They will often do it when you're massaging their gluteals. Sometimes you'll be so deep in your massage trance that the flatulence will startle you, and your hands will jerk away from the body. To their credit, they will almost always say, "Excuse me."

5 YOU WILL SOMETIMES HAVE POOR BOUNDARIES

It's easy to believe you'll maintain firm boundaries when you're thinking about them in the abstract. However, when your favorite client fails to show up for two appointments in a row, you may feel uneasy about charging your missed-appointment fee. Don't panic. Boundaries are flexible, not rigid lines. Sometimes pushing beyond what we think is professional can build trust. Sometimes it destroys it. Be careful.

6 OBESE CLIENTS ARE DIFFERENT

In a well-meaning effort to stave off prejudice, massage school instructors told us there is no difference between massaging an obese client and a thin client. This just isn't true. Obese clients' bodies rise higher off your table. Depending on their size, your height, and the height of your table, it may be physically impossible to maintain proper body mechanics while you work. It's often difficult to find bony landmarks, and sometimes you're massaging an area because you know that's generally where a muscle begins and ends. None of this means obese people are less deserving of massage. It does mean that your skills and body mechanics might be challenged.

7 CLIENTS CAN CHALLENGE YOU

They will show up late, talk through the entire massage, smell bad, wear perfume that never washes out of your sheets, pass gas (see number four), and cancel at the last minute. They are not trying to annoy you. They're just going about their lives, and you're most likely annoyed because of issues going on in your life. The good news is that being with them usually helps you feel better. If not, maybe it's time for a new line of work.

8 YOU WILL SPEND A LOT OF TIME FOLDING LAUNDRY

You will also spend time checking messages, returning phone calls, designing business cards, sticking mailing labels on promotional fliers, filling out bank deposits, writing SOAP notes, sitting on hold on the phone, placing ads, compiling your taxes, joining networking groups, etc. In other words, you are in business for yourself. The buck starts and stops with you. If you don't want to be responsible for—or won't be good at—all these tasks, work for a spa or chiropractor.

9 YOU WILL NOT GET RICH DOING THIS

When you were planning your career, you figured you'd charge \$65 per massage, give twenty-five massages a week for fifty weeks. You'd make over \$80,000! This is fuzzy math, and it doesn't take into account how difficult it is to find twenty-five clients per week, much less how physically and emotionally demanding it is to give them all good massages. It doesn't take into account when you might be sick or injured or when your clients are sick or injured. The reality is, many massage therapists struggle to make ends meet. You don't go into this profession to get rich. You go into this profession because you really, truly love giving massage. That doesn't mean you shouldn't make a living at it. As a matter of fact, if you're not making a living at it, consider a different profession. We all deserve a career that feeds our soul while paying our bills.



When you were planning your career, you figured you'd charge \$65 per massage, give twenty-five massages a week for fifty weeks. You'd make over \$80,000!

10 YOU HAVE ONE OF THE BEST JOBS ON EARTH

They probably did tell you this in massage school—it's how they got you to hit the books every quarter. The thing is, they were right. You have a job that allows you to move your body instead of sit in a cubicle from nine to five. Every single day you get to learn something new about the human body—this awesome piece of

machinery that carries us through the world. You work with other human beings when they are physically, and often emotionally, vulnerable—in other words, when they are most human. This makes you more human. Be grateful you are smart enough, and blessed enough, to do massage. **m&b**

6 *Liz Prato has been a massage therapist in Portland, Oregon, for more than twelve years. Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including LivePdx, Iron Horse Literary Review, Subtropics, Northwest Women's Journal, Berkeley Fiction Review, and ZZZZYVA. She's working on a novel about grief, art, sexual identity, and the cosmos.*