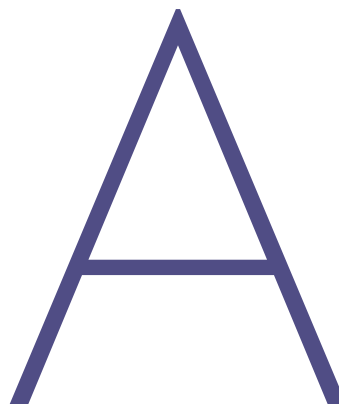


## INTEGRATING NEW TECHNIQUES



DEAR ART,  
A few weeks ago, I took a great workshop with Erik Dalton and learned lots of new ways of working. Now I find that I'm hesitant to try anything, because I work at a spa and am afraid that the clients will think the new work is strange and not like it. I'm already forgetting a lot from the workshop. How do I escape from this straightjacket?

—STUCK & PERPLEXED



DEAR STUCK & PERPLEXED,

You certainly aren't alone. Mark Twain once said, "I've had thousands of problems in my life, most of which never actually happened." It is amazing how often I hear concern that trying new work will send clients scurrying to more conventional therapists. As a Rolfer, I had the same thing happen when I studied craniosacral techniques and more subtle work. I worried that people who expected sharpened elbows and knuckles would be disappointed and that my longtime regular clients would wonder if an imposter had taken over my practice. Nothing could be further from the truth; my clients loved the new skills, just as yours will appreciate your new techniques, in addition to the relaxation work you may normally do.

Just as some meat-and-potato people will never appreciate nouvelle cuisine, some people might resist new bodywork. However, I think that the advantages of showing an increasingly discerning public your newfound skills far outweighs any downside; the rebookings from happy clients and word-of-mouth referrals will be evidence enough. It is far easier to draw clientele who return because they appreciate your work than to try to fit your work to your guesses about client tastes.

Many therapists project their own—sometimes incorrect—assumptions about what clients expect. Some therapists assume any work that approaches intensity may be considered strange. Many mistakenly assume that clients don't want to be bothered in the midst of their headrest snooze to be moved for side-lying work, for example, or that a client will be unhappy if the session doesn't leave all parts of the body equally covered with excess lubrication. In reality, almost all clients will be grateful for skillful work that pays attention to their particular needs, instead of conforming to cookie-cutter convention.

The key to transitioning to a more creative bodywork style is communication with, and education of, your clients. A former student got in touch with me a few weeks after taking a deep-tissue class to say that after languishing for many months at a spa waiting for walk-ins, he is now booked every shift. The techniques he learned were certainly useful, but the main reason for his success was that he took the time before and during the massage to talk to clients to find out what they wanted to improve in their bodies. He went on to explain to them the benefits of spot work, working slowly and deeply in problematic areas, scheduling longer massages to get full-body coverage, and taking enough time to also focus on specific areas.

It's important to find your own sincere way of communicating and transitioning to the ways of working that excite you most. Following are a few suggestions.

Gradually transition to your new way of working. For regular clients, simply say you have some great new things you'd like to try to improve the massage. For new clients, build your confidence and communication skills with those whom you feel a good connection and suspect may be relaxed and open to expanding their experience, instead of on every newcomer who comes through the door.

Spend a few minutes getting to know your clients. Explain that the meter isn't running until you start the bodywork. Educate them about how you work and learn about their needs. The session will be more rewarding for both of you because some connection will have been established, rather than abruptly diving into the massage.



## The key to transitioning to a more creative bodywork style is communication with, and education of, your clients.

Find a peer therapist to trade with and refine your skills. A fear that clients won't like your new work can be more than just projections about their preferences. Sometimes the culprit is simply lack of confidence due to lack of practice.



Develop your expertise slowly, instead of overnight. Review your training and specialize on one technique with those clients who you feel may benefit most. When comfortable, introduce that technique to a broader array of clientele.

In the end, it's important to remember that not every client will see you as the answer to his or her perfect massage. And that's OK. But with good client communication and a desire to do the work you love, your practice will thrive with clients who see value in your more specialized work. Good luck, and let me know how it goes for you. **m&b**

**Q** Art Riggs is the author of *Deep Tissue Massage: a Visual Guide to Techniques* (North Atlantic Books, 2007), which has been translated into seven languages, and the seven-volume DVD series *Deep Tissue Massage and Myofascial Release: A Video Guide to Techniques*. Visit his website at [www.deeptissuemassagemanual.com](http://www.deeptissuemassagemanual.com).