

# talk about touch

WITH MARY ANN FOSTER AND MARY KATHLEEN ROSE

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## TRUTH IN ADVERTISING



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MARY ANN FOSTER: A friend recently complained that an approach marketed as a “step up” from massage turned out to be “three steps down.” He’s a 6’4” traveling businessman who regularly receives deep-tissue massage to relieve the back pain induced by cramped airplane seats.

MARY KATHLEEN ROSE: So, what was this “step up” from massage?

MAF: He and his wife bought gift certificates at a well-respected health center and they were told they would get “massage plus some.” They expected aromatherapy and a top-notch physical treatment to work out muscle stiffness and soreness. What they got was a “reiki master in a lab coat” waving his hands above them to move energy through their bodies.

MKR: Hmmm. And they were expecting massage. Sounds suspicious.

MAF: Yes, they felt skeptical of the practitioner’s rambling about his professed spiritual capacities. At least my friend got to lie down. His wife was told to sit up for her session. She became particularly uncomfortable when the therapist proceeded to use a wand to clear her aura. As a devout Christian, she felt “creepy,” like she had been conned by a “psychic” who talked incessantly in “an attempt to convert her to his beliefs.”

MKR: Yikes! Religion is dangerous territory in a massage session.

MAF: They left their sessions feeling confused, disappointed, and ripped off. They were so stressed out they called me right away to find out if this type of treatment was legitimate. I felt empathy for my friends, but I also felt embarrassed for our profession. The clinic failed to convey what services were actually being offered, which reflects poorly on them.

MKR: It reminds me of an experience I had after an overzealous attempt to ride my bicycle when I was hopelessly out of shape. I made an appointment on short notice for a massage with someone I had not seen before. After lying on the table, I closed my eyes in anticipation, awaiting a good massage and relief from my injury and pain. The therapist entered the room. I waited... and waited... and waited for her to touch me, but she continued to shuffle around the room doing who knows what. After a few minutes of mounting tension, I popped my eyes open to survey the situation.

MAF: I’d be nervous waiting. What was she doing?

MKR: She was waving a pendulum over my navel. “I’m balancing your chakras,” she intoned.

MAF: Lucky you, it’s about time someone balanced your chakras! I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that.

MKR: Thanks a lot! Actually, I burst out in tears and said, “I can balance my own chakras. I’m in so much pain. Please would you just touch me?” It is so disheartening when you expect one thing and get another.

MAF: Expectations are a two-way street. I can remember times early in my practice when I tried a new approach and felt like a fool when I realized the client didn’t like it. Client may not tell you they don’t like something, but when they don’t return, you get the message loud and clear.


MKR: I’ve had similar experiences, some too humbling to describe. I’ve learned that I can’t assume that what I have to offer matches the client’s needs or expectations. It is so important to be clear about what I offer, as well as to be clear in asking the client: “What do you need? How can I help?”


MAF: I did ask my friend if he said anything to the practitioner about his discomfort or to the health center about their vague marketing information. He hadn’t. He just endured the session, then asked for a refund on the way out. When I shared his story with my massage students, they were horrified to hear that clients don’t speak up when they’re uncomfortable.

MKR: About client feedback: if you don’t ask, they won’t tell. I let my clients know that I welcome their feedback during the session. I tell them, “As we go along, let me know if anything is uncomfortable or if you need me to do anything differently.” This puts them at ease and lets them know that they are in control.

MAF: I think the most difficult part of practicing massage, especially when we practice eclectic methods, is to simply and clearly communicate what we do, using language the client can understand.

MKR: I agree. Massage is, after all, a business; and the client is best served by truth in advertising. **m&b**

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