

massage & bodywork

november/december 2016

THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

By Joseph E. Muscolino, DC

Often-Overlooked Muscles



Sternohyoid,
longus colli, and
longus capitis

Flexor pollicis
longus

Palmar
interossei

Quadratus
femoris

ALSO

Pour, Don't Push:
Flow Into Your Bodywork

How Not to Make
Sciatica Worse

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Zika: What
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By David M. Lobenstine

POUR DON'T PUSH

How to Massage with Greater Depth and Ease

I love our profession, and I worry about our profession. With each continuing education workshop I teach, I am moved by the devotion of these therapists—their eagerness to learn, their willingness to grow themselves, the sincerity of their practice. And I am simultaneously horrified—contorted body mechanics, shoulders that creep up toward ears, arms pressing so hard they shake, gritted jaws and gripping hands, and endless overexertion. We are devoted to helping our clients, but too often we seem equally devoted to injuring ourselves.



Photography by Elena Ray
Illustrations by Gene Klein

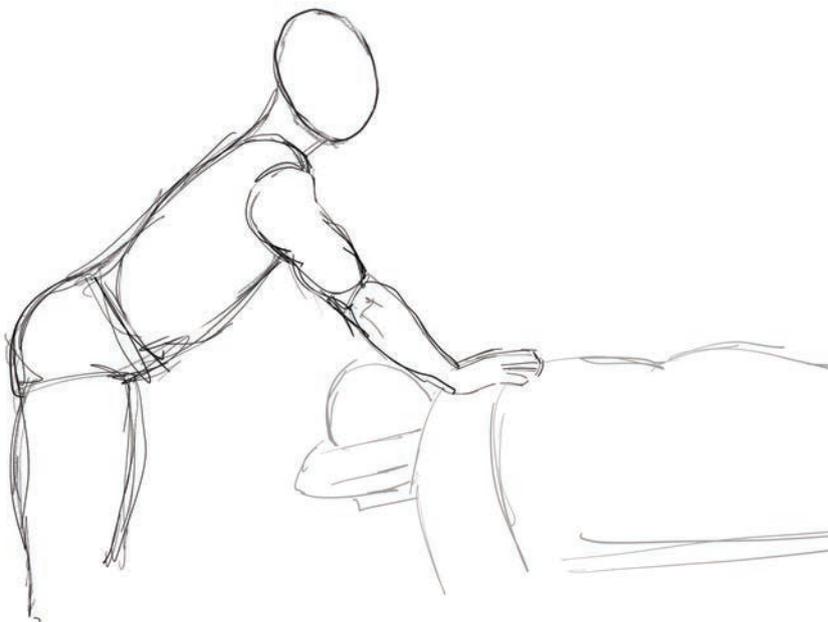


We are therapists. We understand the body.

We understand how it works (and more importantly, how and when and why it doesn't work). So why are we, of all people, so good at wearing out our bodies?

The reasons are numerous, of course. But there is one particular reason we don't talk about enough: we are often *too good* at our jobs. I don't mean that we have too many skills, but rather, that we are too determined to do a good job. We are too determined to make our clients feel better. I know this sounds weird to say, but we *care too much*. And caring too much has a pernicious result: we work too hard. We think we know what is best for the client, so we try to force that client into feeling better. We all know what happens next. We get frustrated when that client doesn't appreciate the fact that he just received every last ounce of energy we have. We spend more and more sessions thinking less and less about the particular strokes we are doing, or the particular body on our table. We ache. We tune out. We burn out.

The vast majority of problems that hobble us, I believe, originate in this basic problem of caring too much. The thumb pain and wrist sprains and backaches are, more often than we realize, not the problem itself, but symptoms of this deeper problem. We are helpers. We want to help. We want to help so badly it hurts.



Of course, caring is a good thing. But we must care more carefully, because too much caring, in my experience, manifests in a very particular way: too much pushing. We are so eager for our clients to feel better that, more often than not, we literally *push* them to feel better. We dig and mash and poke and press. We pull and stretch and push some more. In short, in our determination to make their muscles feel better, we end up using our muscles too much.

The result is that we therapists become an army of pushers. We are pushing good feeling, rather than drugs, but we have created an epidemic nonetheless. And we are the ones who suffer. (Our clients suffer, too, I suspect, more frequently than they let on, but that is a topic for another article.) The longer we try to force those tight muscles to relax, to force our clients to feel better, the more we become addicted to the pushing. We become convinced that straining with our muscles is the only way to effect change, the only way to be a good therapist, the only way to give clients what they want.

After all, there are all those clients who say they like it when it hurts. Aren't we supposed to hurt a little, too? Isn't that litany of aches and pains and strains—the conversation that is happening right now in the break room of spas everywhere—proof that you are a good therapist?

No. We do not have to hurt—either our clients or ourselves—in order to be good therapists. There is another way. But it requires us to reconsider the very basics of how we approach our work. Because, ultimately, we will become more effective therapists if we care less about fixing our clients. I believe we need to care as much about how we feel while we give a massage as how our client feels while he receives that massage. I believe we should aim to *facilitate*, rather than *fix*.

Here is what I propose: instead of pushing, we need to learn (actually, we need to relearn) how to pour. Instead of muscling





into our clients, we need to melt into them. And instead of relying on muscle strength, we need to rely on two far more powerful elements: our body weight and our breath.

EVERY STROKE BEGINS FROM THE FEET

Each time we give a massage, we must remain aware of so many things. And yet, in our determination to help, we focus our awareness on the wrong things. Namely, our hands. Here is the first step in altering how you work: forget about your hands. Yes, our hands feel like the keys to our careers. Our

clients tell us that we have “great hands”—our hands are where the magic happens, right? But too much attention to our hands is actually what gets us into trouble, what prompts the addiction to pushing. Instead? You should be focusing on your feet.

Every stroke feels better for the client, and for you, when it begins with your feet. When you first pay attention to where your feet are, and what your feet are doing, you can work both with greater depth and greater ease.

When my work is at its best, my hands are not actually doing anything—they are not making anything happen.

They are merely delivering my contact to the client. What happens if you see your hands (and your thumbs, and your elbows) not as a tool that fixes things, but rather as just a method for delivering each stroke? I want you to feel that point of contact with the client as merely the end of a long chain of movement—a long chain that begins with your feet.

Here is a challenge for you to try in your next session—a way to begin to massage from your feet.



When you contact the body, first do nothing.

Don't Touch

Enter your treatment room, adjust the bolster, the face cradle, the temperature—do whatever you usually do to ready the client for the session. Then—and here's the key—start the session by doing nothing. Stand at the head of the table, or wherever you normally begin, with your feet hip-width apart and your hands hanging at your sides. Don't make contact with your client just yet.

Instead? Notice your feet. Bend your knees ever so slightly up and down; wiggle your toes. Feel your body being filled on the inhalation, and then allow your body to sink ever so slightly as you let yourself exhale all the way down to empty. Feel the solidity of your feet on the floor. If you are feeling daring, take a second easy breath—still without touching the client. After following that exhalation all the way down, then—and only then—initiate contact.

If you are like most therapists, standing next to your client and not putting your hands on them will be difficult. When there is a body on our table, it seems almost blasphemous to withhold our touch. How can we be givers if we don't, at every possible moment, give?

But your touch is more beneficial when it is grounded, when it emerges from the entirety of your body, rather than from obligation or duty or habit. (In fact, as we'll see, not contacting your client for these first few breaths of a massage can actually make the client more aware of their own body; the absence of touch, ironically, can actually enhance our sense of connection.)

That same attention to your feet can continue throughout the session. When you use your feet as a means of anchoring your own awareness, you'll notice your work shifting. Here's where things get really fun. What you will find, I hope, is that paying attention to your feet not only prevents you from ignoring your own body, and prevents

you from trying to force your client to relax, but also gives you access to one of your most powerful tools: your body weight.

Yes, you probably have an amazing handshake. And maybe those extensors and flexors of your forearms are so developed that you can make them pop and bulge. Your triceps probably aren't too shabby, either. But here's the problem: if you are relying on those muscles to make your clients happy, you are making your own body unhappy. Those delicate, finely tuned muscles of the arms—let alone the even more finely tuned muscles of the thumbs and fingers—were not meant for the five back-to-back deep-tissue sessions you did the other day. The sooner you accept that, the longer your career will be.

So, what *does* make a lifetime of cross-fiber friction possible? Your body weight. Whether we are big or small, our bodies are our best resource (and too often, by that fifth massage of the day, our most forgotten resource). When we clench our upper body in order to push into a client, we are simply working inefficiently. You have more power in your hips than in your hands.

But, just as important, when we clench and push, we are ultimately making our jobs harder. Because when we tense our shoulders and dig into those knots, the client's tissue responds in kind. When you were a kid on the playground, you didn't like getting pushed around. You would run away, your body all tense and nervous and frustrated. Or you would push back. The same is true of the muscles of every one of our clients. In other words, when our bodies are contacted with force—when we are pushed around—our instinctive reaction is the same, whether on the massage table or on the playground. That feeling of force doesn't make us want to relax, it makes us want to defend ourselves—either by fighting or fleeing. (I think this is why some clients always seem to want more pressure—because the deeper you dig in,

the more their muscles tighten and guard, and thus they literally don't feel what you are doing. For those clients who ask us to push harder and harder, that's actually the opposite of what we should be doing.) Our own muscular exertion causes clients' muscles to tense up—whether consciously or unconsciously—which means we have to work harder, which means they tense further, and on and on. Often, both client and therapist are unaware of this self-perpetuating cycle, and we assume that more aggressive treatment, and more discomfort, must be the answer.

But when we use our body weight to pour, rather than push, the client works with us rather than defending against us. We are able to work with greater depth and at the same time work with greater ease. That principle—using your body weight to create the pressure the client needs, while feeling less strain yourself—is at the core of my continuing education workshops.

After working with hundreds of therapists, I can say with confidence that the longer you've been a massage therapist, the harder it is to accept this principle. You may think you *believe* in pouring, rather than pushing, but your body, after hundreds and hundreds of massages, believes something else—our muscles tend to be egotistical, and believe, above all else, in the power of our muscles. But, if you give your brain and your body a chance to play with the concept of pouring, the possibilities for your massage work will expand dramatically. You may even look forward to that fifth massage of the day.

HOW TO POUR

H Let's see if you can feel the power that comes from your feet—the power of pouring. Take off your shoes and socks so you can feel your feet more specifically. Lower your table a notch or two below where you usually set it (you'll see why in a minute). Stand at the head of the table (or the side—doesn't matter), with your feet hip-width apart and parallel to each other,

about a foot back from the table's edge. Bend your knees slightly, and take a few easy breaths, doing nothing except feeling your feet making contact with the floor.

Now, imagine your body is a big sack of water (which, after all, it pretty much is). And imagine that each of your extremities ends in a cup—you have two “hand cups” and two “foot cups.” Every time you move your body, you are simply pouring this “water” of your body weight between your four different “cups.” Every move we make, every single moment of every single day—whether we're typing an

When we use our body weight to pour, rather than push, the client works with us rather than defending against us.

email or running a marathon—happens by distributing that water wherever we need it to be between the different parts of our body, in order to do whatever we need to do.

Right now, as you stand at your table and do nothing but notice, all of this water is distributed between your two foot cups. Lean to the right, and some of the water that's in your left foot cup will shift into your right foot cup. Return your trunk to center and your water distributes evenly once again between the two foot cups. Now bend your knees slightly and place your palms on the massage table. As you tip forward and make contact with the

Once you feel the effortless change that comes from pouring, you'll see you've been working harder than you need to.

table, some of your water tips forward, too, and pours from your feet cups into your hand cups. The further you tip forward, the more your water will redistribute from feet to hands. With me so far?

Try to find a middle ground, where your water is evenly distributed between your two hand cups and your two feet cups. As your body already instinctively knows, you do so by moving your trunk (or more specifically, your hips) forward and back. (Here we can extend the water metaphor: imagine the bowl of your pelvis as the body's pitcher, the vessel that holds your water. How you shift your hips determines where your water is poured between your four cups.)

Now, let's feel how this pouring can facilitate your own work. Once again, shift your hips until you feel your water evenly distributed between all four of your cups. Notice how you are sinking into the table, even though you are not pressing or pushing with your muscles. In other words, if there was a client beneath your hands right now, they'd be enjoying themselves. However, we can't stay in this spot forever. At some point, you'll need to move your hands to a different spot, or come back to standing. How will you move? The way that is hard (and the way that's habitual, especially at the end of a long day) is to contract the erectors of the spine, breaking contact with the table by yanking our upper body upright. In the process, we use our intervertebral joints as our hinge, which is exactly how—session after session, day after day—they don't want to be used.

But there is an easier way. You can release your hands from the client simply by pouring more of your water weight back into your feet. How? Shift your hips backward. That's it. Or as I say to my students, "When in doubt, stick your booty out." The farther back your hips move toward the wall behind you, the more water pours out of your hands, and back into your feet. Once your weight is back far enough, your hips are centered again over your feet, and standing upright is easy, rather than a strain for the spine. (When the weight of your upper body is centered over your

feet, you will naturally use your hip joints, rather than your intervertebral joints, as the hinge that brings you back to standing.)

By moving your hips forward and back—closer to the table and farther from the table—you are tipping that pitcher, and thus determining how much water pours into your hand cups and how much stays in your feet cups. Such movement—created via our hips rather than our back—feels nearly effortless, especially compared to that habitual overexertion of our erectors to yank our body upright. Note, however, that this effortless movement is only possible if our knees are slightly bent. When we lock our knees (as we so often do while massaging), we lose our hip pitcher, and we have no choice but to rely on our overtaxed erectors. Once you feel the effortless change that comes from pouring, you'll see you've been working harder than you need to. Next, let's discuss how you can achieve more with your clients by doing less.

HOW TO POUR MORE
Once you've practiced pouring into your table, the next step is to try it with a client. Or better yet, experiment on a fellow therapist. With the table a notch or two lower than usual, find that parallel (or horse-riding) stance we've been talking about: feet hip-width apart, knees slightly bent. With your client lying face down, undrape their back but don't apply any oil (yet). Stand at the head of the table. Keep all your water in your feet cups, and then bend your knees a bit more; you want to be able to place just the weight of your hands on the client's back, but without (yet) pouring any of your water into the hands. Now, follow your exhalation slowly down to empty. Do nothing except notice that instinct to begin, to start your session, to contract the muscles of your arms, shoulders, and back—to help, help, help. (It's OK. You can admit it. The other people reading this are thinking the exact same thing. After all, if we're not working



The lean.

hard, doesn't that mean we're not good therapists?) But now that you have recognized this instinct, I want you to resist it; I want you to see what happens if you don't work hard. Instead, merely tip your hips forward, ever so slightly, and feel your water weight begin to pour from your feet cups into your hand cups. In other words, feel yourself applying pressure to the client's back—without doing anything at all.

Ask your client how the pressure is. If they ask for more, again notice your instinct. Typically, that request causes our shoulders to gravitate toward our ears and our forearms to stiffen, as we prepare to drill down into the client, to show them that we really are strong enough to do a good job. But as you have probably guessed by now, I believe our strength has very little to do with delivering a great massage. So once again, resist this instinct, and instead do the opposite. To go deeper, you need less tension, not more tension; less effort, not more effort.

So how do you apply more pressure with less effort? Once again, the answer is in your feet. Do nothing with your upper body; instead, step your feet a few inches backward, away from the table. Moving your feet cups away from the table shifts more weight, and thus more pressure, into your hand cups, and into the client. This may seem like a contradiction, but moving your feet *away* from the table accomplishes the same

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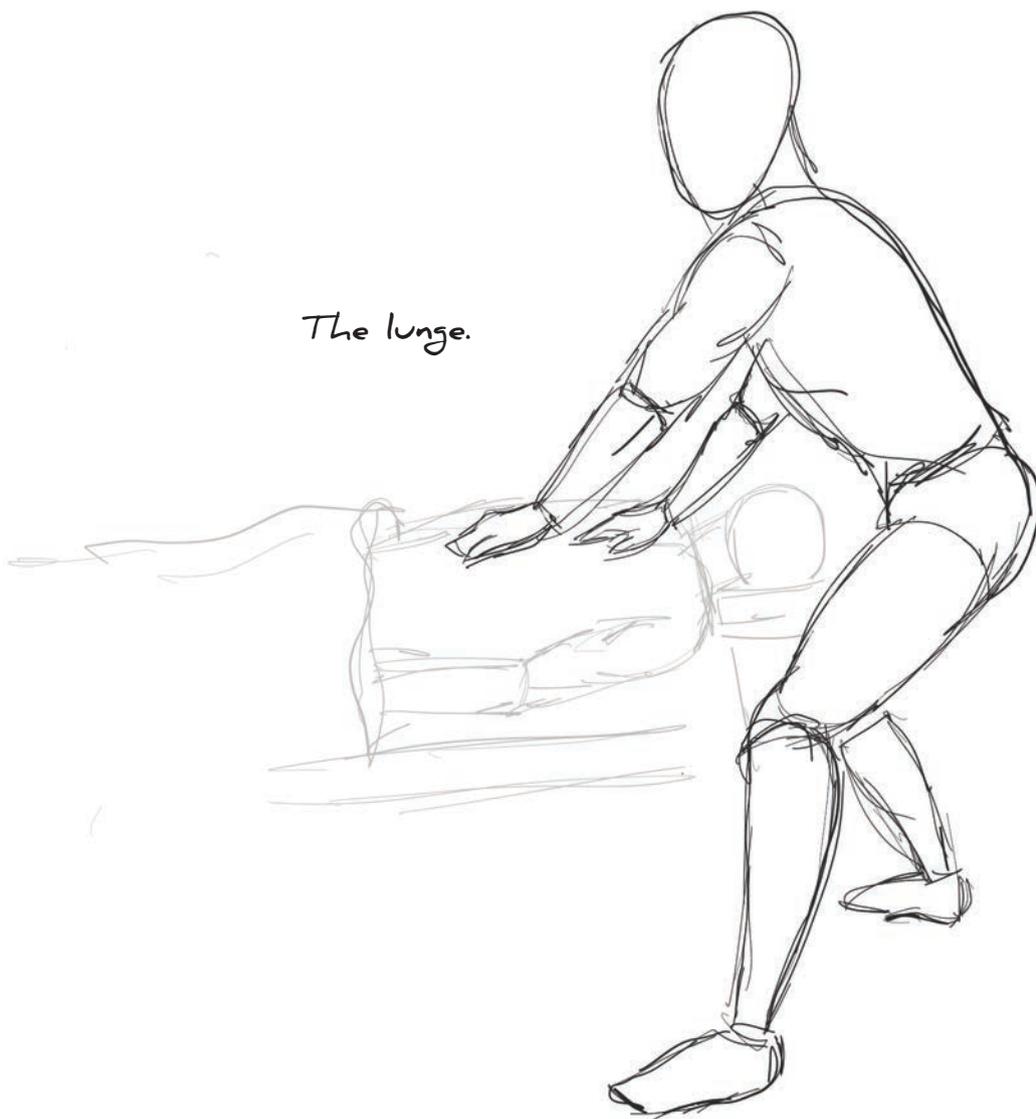
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The lunge.



thing as tipping your hips and upper body *toward* the table—but with the inverse movement, moving feet instead of hips, and moving away from, rather than toward, the table. The reason is simple physics: by keeping your hips and upper body where they are, and moving your feet backward, you are evacuating the feet cups of water, thus your water weight has no choice but to pour further into your hands.

If the client still wants more pressure, you can continue to step farther back. (If you get all the way to a plank position and the client still doesn't have enough pressure, then this is an indication that your table is still too high. Lower the table another notch or two and try this experiment again.) You should also experiment with shifting your point of contact, from your palms to your soft fists, fingertips and thumbs, and forearms; all of these are alternate versions of your hand cups, and enable you to change both the depth and the specificity of your pouring.

Chances are your client will like what is happening. They probably won't be able to articulate exactly why they like this contact, but you'll feel their approval: their exhalation will lengthen, their muscles will start to loosen, they may even begin to snore.

And at the same time, chances are, you will be suspicious of what is happening. How can you be giving a good massage if you are not doing anything at all? This experience of ease is really hard for us therapists to accept. But listen to your client. And listen to your own body—notice your easy exhalation down to empty; notice the unusual sensation of ease across your shoulders and back; notice your water weight poured, however feels right, between hands and feet, doing nothing at all, and yet doing exactly what the client wants.

POURING WITH OIL

PAs you practice this pouring, you'll quickly discover there is only so much you can do in this horse-riding stance, where your feet stay parallel to one another. For any long strokes, whether along the spine or up the legs, you need to be able to step one foot in front of the other. So now, we need to figure out how we can use that familiar lunge stance and still incorporate this new concept of pouring.

The problem with the lunge—ubiquitous among seasoned practitioners and new graduates alike in my continuing education workshops—is that we place one foot in front of the other in order to make that long stroke possible, but then we forget about our lower body as we actually perform the stroke.

Let's see how we can pour, rather than push, to make those long lunges less taxing for us and more beneficial for our clients. As we do so, let's also discuss how we can incorporate oil into our work without losing the ease, and the depth, that pouring enables. Two key points to begin.

Lower: If you haven't already lowered your table a notch or two, do so now. When you lunge, you become shorter, since your feet are farther apart from one another than they are when you are in the horse-riding stance. Hence, the lower table becomes even more important here, to prevent your shoulders from

creeping up toward your ears as you apply more pressure, and the subsequent inevitability of pushing into the client from that compressed position.

LESS: No matter how eager you are to use your body weight, excess oil will ruin all those good intentions. Even if you are pouring perfectly, if you have too much oil on your hands, you begin to slip and slide. We've all felt what happens next: to stop yourself from slipping, you contract your arms isometrically—in other words, you stiffen your upper body in order to maintain your pressure. Here, you are not technically pushing into the client, but the effect is the same: you are working harder than you need to—in this case, you are tightening to maintain your pressure—and the client in turn feels that excess tension and responds, whether consciously or not, by tightening their own body.

The exact amount of oil you should use depends on the size of the body part you are working, how dry the client's skin is, and the type of work you are doing. But I encourage the therapists in my workshops to start by using half of what they typically use. They are often surprised at what seems like a contradiction: using less oil makes our work easier, rather than harder, because we are more able to maintain a calm, and conscious, contact. (Besides, it is always easier to add more oil than it is to wipe excess oil off.)

Less oil means more drag on the skin, which encourages you to slow your strokes. We often assume we must speed up in order to cover the whole body in 60 minutes. But, as you hopefully have already discovered with your pre-oil pouring earlier, fewer strokes that are slower and more intentional are nearly always more effective than more strokes that are rushed.

PUT IT TO PRACTICE

With these keys in mind, let's practice. Find that willing body again, place them prone, and undrape their right leg. Apply a small amount of your oil, lotion, or cream, assume your usual starting position alongside the client's lower leg, and then do a bit of effleurage, just as you've done countless times before. As your hands move up the client's leg, notice where

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How to Pour: A Checklist

- ✓ Bend your knees slightly.
- ✓ Contact the client by leaning your hips forward, rather than pushing from your upper body.
- ✓ Pour as much (or as little) of your body weight as the client needs.
- ✓ If you need more pressure, you can:
 - Lean your hips closer to the client.
 - Decrease the bend at your knees.
 - Step your feet farther away from the table.
 - Come up onto your tiptoes.
 - Lower your table.(Doing all of these will increase the amount of body weight you are pouring into the client.)
- ✓ If you need less pressure, you can:
 - Bend your knees further.
 - Step your feet closer to the table.
 - Lean your hips away from the client.(Doing all of these will decrease the amount of body weight you are pouring into the client.)
- ✓ Once you've established your contact, the joints of the upper body (fingers, wrists, elbows, and shoulders) should hardly move.
- ✓ Instead, create the stroke by moving the hips, knees, and feet; your point of contact simply manifests that lower-body movement.

your feet are.¹ Chances are, your front foot (in this example, your right foot) is almost directly in front of the back (left) one. No matter how long or deep your lunge is—in other words, no matter how far ahead your front foot is from your back foot—chances are your stance is narrow. Indeed, when the therapists in my workshops assume their habitual lunge position, more often than not it looks like they are massaging while walking on a tightrope.

We tend toward a narrow stance, I think, because our instinct is to keep ourselves as close to the client as possible.² That instinct makes sense. Trouble is, the more in line your feet are (that is, the more you look like a tightrope walker), the more limited your options are. Two reasons why: First, the narrower your stance, the more likely you are to wobble or lose your balance; thus the more you are unconsciously clenching the muscles of your hips and low back, simply to keep yourself from falling over. As always, the client feels that clenching, and no therapeutic good comes from it. Secondly, and even more important, is that the narrow stance wastes our body weight: we pour too much of our water into that front leg rather than into the client. When your front leg is in line with the back leg, chances are your hands are pretty close to that front leg. Thus, even if you try and pour your body weight toward your hands, some of it will never make it there, as it will get stuck in that front leg. The more of your water weight that ends up in your front leg, the less you have available to pour into your hands, and thus into the client's body. There is no way to make up for this wasted water weight as you try to generate sufficient pressure, *except* to push into the client.

Wasting your body weight into the front foot is often the first step of that vicious cycle that undoes so many of us—you waste your body weight, the client asks for more pressure (or you think you need to give more pressure), you push with your upper body, the client tenses in response to being pushed, you have to push even harder, you tire, and neither you

nor your client is entirely satisfied. With each of these cycles, our careers shorten ever so slightly.

How can we avoid this cycle? The solution, once again, starts by paying attention to your feet. Come back to your starting position near the client's ankle. This time, when you step that front (right) foot forward, counteract that tightrope tendency—take a step that is the same length as you do normally (so that your front foot is level with the client's knee, or whatever feels right), but swing that front foot to the right, so when you plant it again, it is about a foot away from the side of the table. That widening creates a small, but crucial difference. In our habitual tightrope position, as we have seen, some of our water weight gets stuck in that table-bound front leg. But, with a widened lunge, you have stepped off the tightrope! Because that front foot is away from the table, it is also away from your hands. As a result, you have three distinct places to pour into: your back leg, your front leg, and your hands (or whatever your point of contact). In other words, you have formed a tripod. Now, as you sink along the client's calf and into the hamstrings, it is far easier to differentiate between water weight that is poured into your arms versus wasted into your front foot. In turn, it is far easier to adjust, effortlessly. If the pressure is too intense, for example, you just lean your body ever so slightly to the right, and some of that water weight will pour from your arms into your front leg. If the client needs more pressure, you just tip your body to the left, and that water weight will shift from the front foot into your point of contact. With practice, you can gain a level of control over your strokes that is as exquisite as it is effortless.

The final key here is the same essential principle of the horse-riding stance: whenever possible, prevent your knees from locking. As you've seen, when our knees are slightly bent, we are able to pour our body weight simply by tipping our hips forward. That fluidity is, ironically, even easier to lose in these longer, moving strokes: when we lunge, we tend to lock our knees—again, perhaps to stabilize us in our tightrope-walking position—so our legs, splayed and straight, seem like they are forming a triangle with the floor.

This locked position gives the illusion of strength, but the opposite is true. A locked lower body merely means the upper body must make

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everything happen. And when our shoulders and arms have to do it all, pushing is inevitable. Not only must our shoulders and arms muscle through that effleurage stroke, but our erectors are especially taxed: we rely on them to eccentrically contract as we lean further and further forward to push our way along the leg, and then they must concentrically contract to pull our upper body back to standing and begin the next (effort-full) stroke.

The alternative can be revelatory. With a lower body that is not locked, you can keep your back and arms in nearly the exact same position for the entire length of this stroke. In other words, it is possible for your lower body to do all the pouring, and for your upper body to just go along for the ride, providing the point of contact but no force. How does this happen? At the start of the stroke, notice the position of your arms relative to your trunk: the arms and the front of your body will form somewhere between a 30- and a 45-degree angle. Keep your knees slightly bent, sink into the tissue and slide up the calf; feel the stroke powered by your hips, rather than your arms or shoulders. Depending on your height and the length of your client's leg, somewhere around the client's knee that angle between your arms and the front of your body will begin to widen. In order to maintain your contact, you'll have to reach forward with your back. Reaching, as we know, is not ideal; that's when we start to push, and that's when we tax the muscles of the back, shoulders, and arms.

The solution, like always, is to adjust your feet. Once that angle begins to widen, the majority of your body weight will be spread between your hands and your front foot, and your back foot will have relatively little water weight left. As a result, that back foot is easy to move even as you maintain the stroke. Slide that back foot until it is under your upper body once

again. Now, tip slightly toward the table, letting the water weight from your front foot pour into your back foot once again. That leaves your front foot free to slide forward, so that you return to your original, ready-to-pour position. With practice, this stutter step takes about a second and means you can effortlessly continue up to the client's hip: you no longer need to reach with your back to continue the stroke. Instead, your upper body can maintain that original angle between arms and trunk, and your water weight can pour, as much or as little as the client needs, from your hips into your hands.

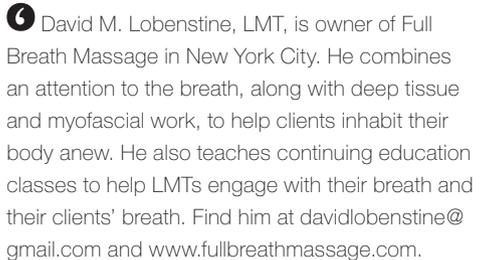
Eventually, these pouring strokes will resemble the slow, full-body fluidity of tai chi.³ One of my wonderful teachers, Bob Altheim, described the central principle of tai chi as follows: "The motion is rooted in the feet, generated by the legs, controlled by the waist, and manifested through the fingers." The same is true when you are pouring rather than pushing. Your fingers (and all other points of contact) are just the delivery mechanism: they are manifesting the stroke, but not actually creating it. Instead, the real movement—the reason your client feels fulfilled—emerges because you have placed your feet in the optimal position, and then moved your lower body to deliver the water weight the client needs. Anything else is excess and clouds that essential, and effortless, contact with the client.

WHY TO POUR
Pouring feels good, both for you and for your client—no small accomplishment. But its deeper value is that it frees us from the dangerous illusion that we can—and that we must—fix our clients. If we see ourselves as facilitators rather than fixers, we will make our careers longer and more satisfying. As important, when we pour rather than push, we become a model for our clients: we

demonstrate to our clients that each of us has the capacity to alter and deepen our own relationship with our own body; that we can create change gracefully. In other words, pouring can be liberating for client and therapist both. Because when we embody the principles of pouring, we are able to inhabit our bodies with greater ease and live our lives with greater effectiveness. **m&b**

Notes

1. A note of clarity: when performing lunge strokes along the sides of the table, your back leg should always be the leg closest to the table. Your front leg—the leg you are pouring toward as you perform the stroke—should always be your outside leg, the one farther away from the table.
2. A related problem emerges here: when we get too close to the table we tend to lean against the table. There's nothing inherently wrong with leaning against the table—indeed, for some strokes it is required—but the problem is that when we are against the table, we tend to waste our body weight, as we pour it into the table, rather than into the client.
3. The continuing education workshops of Carole Osborne offer a gorgeous glimpse into how we can utilize the principles of tai chi in our work. Like so many therapists, my work has been transformed under her instruction, as brilliant as it is gentle.

 David M. Lobenstine, LMT, is owner of Full Breath Massage in New York City. He combines an attention to the breath, along with deep tissue and myofascial work, to help clients inhabit their body anew. He also teaches continuing education classes to help LMTs engage with their breath and their clients' breath. Find him at davidlobenstine@gmail.com and www.fullbreathmassage.com.

Light Work Is Hard, Too

By David M. Lobenstine

I have emphasized how pouring can help you work more deeply (see “Pour, Don’t Push,” page 64). In my experience, clients tend to want (or think they want) more pressure, hence the preponderance of “deep tissue” and “sports massage” on spa menus. That insistence on working deep is often the bane of our therapeutic existence; many of us burn out because we don’t know how to satiate the client’s demand for depth while still taking care of our own bodies.

But there is a flip side here: very light work can also be brutal on our bodies. Nobody talks about getting injured because of doing too many salt scrubs, but working with minimal pressure can be just as hard on us. In our typical stance, as we have seen, we work with locked knees, relying on the muscles of our spine to lower our point of contact onto the client and pull us up off the client. When we are working deep, at least we can rest our weary limbs on the client!

With light work, however, we have to keep ourselves upright, barely touching the body; as a result, the muscles of the spine are firing constantly to prevent us from applying too much pressure. With locked knees and a bent back, not only are we not working with our body weight, we are essentially working *against* our own body weight.

For this reason, pouring is just as important for the whole spectrum of light work—from your generic Swedish massage, to the growing panoply of scrubs and wraps and other skin-focused treatments, to all manner of work in hospitals or hospices or anywhere else you see medically frail clients.

When you utilize your whole body to create the stroke, as we have seen, applying additional pressure is easy; but just as important, applying *less* pressure is also just as easy. Remember: “When in doubt, stick your booty out.” The ability to shift your water weight away from the client—to tip your hips backward—means you are perpetually able to decrease the amount of force you are working with, whenever you need to, but without using the muscles of your back to do so. Just as important, because you are moving from your hips, and your upper body is staying mostly in the same position, you can do whatever light contact you need—from the long strokes of Swedish to the tiny motions of manual lymph drainage—while keeping your upper body relaxed. **m&b**

6 David M. Lobenstine, LMT, is owner of Full Breath Massage in New York City. He combines an attention to the breath, along with deep tissue and myofascial work, to help clients inhabit their body anew. He also teaches continuing education classes to help LMTs engage with their breath and their clients’ breath. Find him at davidlobenstine@gmail.com and www.fullbreathmassage.com.