



The Massage Therapy Career Guide

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**The Truth About
Becoming a Massage Therapist**

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Preface

The **Massage Therapy Career Guide – The Truth About Becoming a Massage Therapist** has been an ongoing project since 2002 and is created for readers who are considering a career in massage therapy. I am writing this book in an effort to help you in deciding if a career in massage is for you or not. While massage may seem like a ‘relaxing’ field to be in, there are many things that massage schools and associations don’t tell you about that will help you in making a more informed decision about your career in massage therapy. There are many massage therapists who struggle to make a living. I was one of them. When I became a massage therapist in 1987 there was no one out there to teach business skills and marketing. We all just learned from each other. Becoming a massage therapist was more about making a lifestyle choice than making money. Now you can do both. Once you have the inside story you can choose a career in massage therapy and become one of the pioneers of leading the massage profession into the future – whatever that may be.

It has been rewritten many times based on the feedback and inquiries from readers at www.message-career-guides.com and in my online discussion group at Yahoo Groups!

Please take a moment to provide your feedback when you have finished reading. I appreciate any and all comments, questions and feedback by sending me an email! I look forward to hearing from you.

To Your Success!

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(Licensed Massage Practitioner)

Introduction

I have been practicing massage therapy full time since 1989 after attending a 250 hour massage training program in 1987 through Seattle Massage School (now Everest College). Through the years I have seen many changes in the profession. The demand for massage has gradually increased and the number of massage schools has dramatically increased from about 50 schools in 1985 to over 1500 today ([Phenomenal Number of Massage Schools](#), by Carl Nelson). This increased demand for massage shows that massage is being more accepted and used as a viable method of healing. Massage is being used for auto accident injuries, sports injuries, for relaxation and rejuvenation at resorts and spas and for treatment and prevention of injury and disease. With this increased demand and increase in the number of massage schools has also come other professional issues. There are not enough trained massage therapy teachers to fill the schools and the schools are only able to teach massage. They don't teach you how to get a job, create a job or how to start your own business. While the professional associations and massage schools make becoming a massage therapist sound really attractive, they also are in business to make a profit and are in need of massage students and professionals to keep them going. The competition for students has increased which leads to more aggressive advertising and marketing along with less than accurate information about careers in massage therapy.

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Through the years, I have also seen so many massage therapists come and go through the profession. The Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals (one of the major professional associations also referred to as ABMP) now has statistics showing that approximately 60,000 new students join the massage profession while about 50,000 leave each year ([ABMP – Metrics Section](#): Attrition and ongoing concern). How could this be with all of the pictures of massage therapists doing massages on beaches, at high end spas and resorts and with massage becoming more accepted by health care? I haven't looked into the statistics in other professions to know if this is a usual pattern in professions, but still really find this interesting. Why do so many massage therapists leave the profession each year? We don't really know the answer to this question but we can only surmise that there is something going on.

But the questions arise:

What does one need to build a sustainable practice – one that creates the income that is needed to provide adequately for the family and one that brings meaning and joy to the massage therapist's life?

What is needed for a massage therapists to perform massage competently while building a massage practice or working as a massage employee?

What does one need to do to create a \$100,000 income from their massage practice? (I am using this number mainly because it is not usually equated with a massage therapy career, but I feel that it is entirely possible and should be the norm).

Who will be the most successful in the massage profession?

How much can you make as a massage therapist and what is needed to get that?

Will you be able to find a job that can support you and your family?

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While there is no clear answer to any of these questions, it is more about what is needed for **YOU** to be successful in a massage therapy career. Knowing what you need and learning to get those needs met in a school and throughout your professional massage career is what becoming a massage therapist is really all about.

People come to the massage profession for various reasons. Some want to participate in a profession that helps others and provides a more meaningful way of making a living. Some come into the field after having been injured or faced with a health challenge that massage significantly helped change. Some come into massage looking for the freedom to work when they want or just to have a part time income to supplement the families financial needs. Most seek it as a second or even third career. Most are females and average 44 years of age and are single. (For other statistics see www.massagetherapy.com metrics section). Some come to massage through a 'calling' -they feel called to the massage profession. The thing is that even though these are valid reasons for pursuing a massage therapy career or any career for that matter, these reasons are also the exact things that lead to being unable to make it in the massage profession.

So what do you need to know about the massage profession in order to make a more informed decision about your career path? What do you need to know about yourself and your abilities?

Despite all of these less than favorable statistics and facts, a career in massage can be a financially, emotionally and spiritually rewarding career when you enter the career path as a more informed participant... and that is what you are about to do.

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Sit down with your favorite cup of tea or coffee and get ready to explore the truth about becoming a massage therapists and hopefully find inspiration to continue on your path - whatever that may be!

Is a Career In Massage Therapy for You?

One of the most commonly asked questions that I get through my website www.message-career-guides.com is: "Will I" – a single mother, a 50 year old male, a high school student – will I be able to make a living as a massage therapist. There is no way that I can answer that question for anyone. The process of choosing the massage profession and becoming a massage therapist is just that – a process. Your unique situation is yours alone. No one can tell you what is right or wrong for you. (Not even your family, friends or other significant people in your life.) How much you make will depend on what you need to make and your patience and persistence in achieving your goals.

My website www.message-career-guides.com brings in all kinds of similar questions like these. What most are really wanting to know is how will YOU be able to be successful in the massage profession. The thought of changing careers and going into a field that is not well known and that is really in it's infancy can bring up many fears and lead to misconceptions and doubts about whether or not you will be able to make it in a career in massage therapy.

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Single moms are afraid of not being able to support themselves. Men are afraid they will be discriminated against since they are the minority in this profession. Older people are afraid they won't have enough physical stamina or know how, learning at such a late stage in life. Teenagers and young adults are not sure of anything at that stage in life but they don't want to take math classes....Whatever the thought or question that is coming up for you, you will have to take the time to discover the answer for yourself.

Becoming a massage therapist is just like choosing any other profession. It has little to do with the field itself or anything you will learn in massage school. It has little to do with your age, situation, race or abilities. Your ability to be successful in this or any other career depends on the amount of self esteem and self confidence you have and your ability to learn not only about the body but about yourself. It is also about your commitment to being successful which really is more about how passionate you are about your chosen path. Our searches for careers are usually a mirror for the search for ourselves. A. H. Almaas says in his book "Diamond Heart: Book One"

"Your career, interests, relationships are very important – but they are only important insofar as they lead you toward a deeper understanding of yourself. Otherwise they are irrelevant."

Are you interested in learning about health and nurturing? Are you interested in getting massage yourself and understanding what receiving touch in the form of a massage can do to your inner being? Have you used massage therapy successfully to heal a physical injury or nurture your inner emotional and spiritual needs in the past? Does the idea of doing massage excite you? Does it make you feel **more alive**? Are you passionate about learning about yourself and becoming more aware of yourself?

Becoming successful in the massage profession has little to do with how skilled you are, how much you know or much of anything you learn in massage school. I have gotten many really bad massages from people who are very successful. I have also gotten many really great massages from people who struggle week to week to get by.

What does it take to be successful?

Monica Roseberry in her book, "[Marketing Massage](#)" traveled the country over a period of 6 months or so and asked massage therapists and massage schools just what it takes to be successful. What she found was that it has more to do with who they are than anything else.

As she points out in her book - a successful massage therapist has these four qualities:

1. A Desire to Serve
2. The commitment to Succeed
3. A Strong emphasis on professionalism
4. A commitment to excellent customer service

These four things depend on you and you alone. Your background, life situation, talents, knowledge or things you can do – do not really matter.

What makes the difference in whether or not you are successful in the massage profession or not is YOU!

It depends on what you need for yourself. It is finding your unique abilities – what is naturally inherent in you and comes easily. What would you be doing if making a living did not matter? What do you want to be remembered for when you pass away and leave this life? What are you passionate about?

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One of the other things that massage schools will not teach you about is how to decide if a career is right for you. They want students to be filling their classes. I have even heard a comment made that someone at a massage school said "Well we can't help it if they aren't cut out for this business and fail". Yikes!

Choosing any career requires that you take a look at yourself and keep looking until you know what you want. You may not know clearly but choosing a career in massage is not set in stone. You will have many other opportunities and possibly other careers. It isn't the way it used to be where people used to stay in one job or career for all of their working life. Like money and relationships, our careers are really just larger versions of our family of origins. We look to careers to make our lives better, to change jobs/bosses we hate and get away from roles that leave us empty and wanting for more. When I was starting out no one ever asked me to consider if I would like being a massage therapist or if I could make \$100,000 a year as a massage therapist. Today you have to take those things into career choices. Changing jobs may seem like a better option but things really never change until you change what is inside. A career doesn't bring you happiness. Happiness is a quality that needs to be discovered inside through relationships such as a career.

The question that you should be asking instead of how much can I make as a massage therapist is "How much do I want to make as a massage therapist and how can I make that happen?"