



# Pushing Toward Greatness

By David Kent, LMT, NCTMB

Keeping It Simple Series

How does one become a great massage therapist? I recently read an article in Fortune magazine that referenced research on the concept of "greatness." It said, "The lack of natural talent is irrelevant to great success" and went on to say that the secret to great success requires "painful and demanding practice and work." In short, the article concluded that "talent has little or nothing to do with greatness."



What is "greatness" anyway? For some, achieving great success means making a lot of money; for others, greatness springs from internal peace and contentment. I know what I consider

success in my life and practice. While I appreciate that I can earn a living doing what I love and that my success as a massage therapist, lecturer, and product and seminar innovator has made me financially secure, I also define my success by the lives that I touch—figuratively and literally. I love connecting to the patients I see in the treatment room. I enjoy collaborating with doctors, chiropractors and

other healthcare professionals to develop treatment plans for my patients. I like referring back to my anatomy and massage books when I have a challenging case. In short, I feel that my "great" success—if that's what you want to call it—stems primarily from touching my patient's lives for the better. But great success certainly doesn't end there. A mother who got into the massage therapy profession so she could spend more time with her kids is what I would consider a prime example of great success. Ultimately, greatness and success are subjective depending on one's dreams and aspirations.

I am a lifelong student. I enjoy learning because I constantly want to grow and improve.

Once people stop learning, they lose their edge. In my years as a therapist, I have learned that my massage practice is only as good as I am. That's why it's so important to continue learning in every aspect of life:

emotionally, spiritually, physically and professionally. My dear friend and fellow massage therapist, Lynda Solien-Wolfe, has developed many landmark programs that have benefited the massage therapy profession. Lynda produces these results because of what she is constantly saying to herself and those around her,

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for example: "You get what you give and you must constantly improve" or "Let's brainstorm and come up with a few ideas," after a presentation she'll say, "David, how can we do it better next time?"

Do you stay comfortable with the knowledge that you have, or do you challenge yourself to keep improving? Think about the time, money and energy you have spent to get to this point in your career. Do you consider yourself to be a great massage therapist with a great practice? Are you able to say with pride that you have positively influenced people? How do you continue improving yourself? Part of how I strive for greatness in my personal and



professional life revolves around the questions I ask myself everyday: What am I going to learn today? What can I learn from this situation? How can I avoid this challenge in the future? Is this endeavor worth my time and energy?

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*“Are your goals attainable... even more important, are they sustainable for long-term success?”*

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I used to think that successful people were born with unique talents that made them smarter or gave them an advantage. But if, like the Fortune article suggests, people aren't great without hard work, the question is: What is their trick? Well, one trick involves consistent deliberate practice. Great people in any field are those who devote the most hours of focused practice on a subject or skill or, in your case, massage or practice-building techniques.

I like to use Newton's Laws of Motion as metaphors for a person's internal drive and determination. The First Law of Motion states, "Every object in a state of uniform motion tends to remain in that state of motion unless an external force is applied to it."

If your massage practice or any other area of your life is unacceptable to you, there must be a "force" that drives you to change. In this case, that force must come from within. You must find the strength and apply it in such a way that

it motivates you to take action that will lead to positive changes in your life. Newton's third law of motion says that "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

This law reminds me of the impact of cause and effect. If I take no action, I will not see any improvement or change; however, if I apply the knowledge I have and seek to broaden my horizons, if I strive to study and practice consistently, and if I always aim to learn from my mistakes, I will see positive changes in my life. And these positive changes will contribute to my objective of achieving greatness in my life.

Ultimately, you must—not should, not could, but must—spend time dedicated to CANI.

CANI, a phrase coined by motivational speaker Tony Robbins, stands for Constant and Never-ending Improvement.

Robbins developed CANI based on the teachings of Dr. W. Edwards Deming, who is best known for helping Japan establish itself as a worldwide industrial strength following World War II.

Robbins created CANI from the Japanese word kaizen. In Japanese, "kai" stands for "change" and "zen" stands for good, or "change is good."

CANI helps people focus on their goals and establish methods for achieving them. While CANI is not mentioned in the Fortune article, I believe its principles can be applied to the concepts addressed in the article. In this case, CANI would include "activity that's explicitly intended to improve performance."

The article states that to work toward greatness, you must push yourself outside of your normal comfort zone to reach for higher objectives; you must obtain feedback about your

performance; and you must practice.

### **CANI can help you with all of these things.**

So where to begin? Start by evaluating your goals and asking yourself some basic questions: What areas of bodywork do I want to focus on? Who should I study from and why? What programs are available to broaden my learning? Then list the actions necessary to achieve your goals, as well as positive outcomes and potential challenges.

Are your goals attainable for your life? Even more important, are they sustainable for long-term success? Once you determine your goals, outcomes and challenges, you need to ask yourself some empowering questions. These are the questions that will help keep you on the path to achieving your goals and keep you from giving up. The word empowering is key here. The questions that you ask yourself must be positive, even when the situation at hand may not be. Empowering questions do not include questions like, "Why do I always screw things up?" or "Why can't I ever get it right?" These types of questions don't empower you—they just feed the negative part that wants to beat you down. Instead, ask yourself, "What resources are available to me that won't cost me a dime?" or "What can I learn from this situation?" Make sure that the questions you ask of yourself are quality questions that are designed to produce quality answers.

Find someone who can give you constructive feedback and don't be afraid to ask for help. Smart, successful people in any field have mentors. Knowing when to ask for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Surround yourself with quality people who will challenge you and help push you into greatness. Select your mentors with care and note that they should want to grow and evolve with you. Remember too that sometimes your mentor's feedback



won't be exactly what you want to hear, but that doesn't mean that it should be discarded. There is a saying that I heard many years ago that says, "Show me your friends, the people you surround yourself with on a regular basis, and I will show you your standards."

I think of this adage often when I reflect on what I have learned from one of my mentors, Dr. Julian Dwornik, Professor Emeritus at the University of South Florida, College of Medicine. Dr. Dwornik has mentored me since 1992 and continually challenges me to improve myself personally and professionally. It was the combination of the wisdom I gained from my mentor, and my curiosity and commitment to learning that ultimately lead to me develop and teach dissection seminars and expand my growing business.

### Five Steps to Greatness

- Acknowledge that you are worthy of greatness
- Set attainable goals
- Ask empowering questions
- Work hard and practice
- Keep your life in balance

Lastly, don't forget that all great successful people know how to balance. In fact, I think you'll find it difficult to achieve true greatness—or at least a level that makes you feel complete—unless all of the elements of your life

are in balance. Life should never be all work all the time. Learn to take care of yourself by doing things you enjoy and spending time with the people you love.

Hard work is, well, hard work. But don't abandon your dreams and goals. Instead, strive to improve yourself a little more each day. Once you assume this positive attitude, it becomes a part of who you are. Be creative, resourceful and consistently ask yourself empowering questions. You can achieve success. And over time, as one massage therapist after another strives for greatness, this already amazing profession will also be propelled into new and improved levels of greatness.

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#### References

- <sup>1</sup> Colvin, Geoffrey. "What it Takes to be Great" Fortune Oct 30, 2006; p. 88-96.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 94.
- <sup>3</sup> "Newton's Three Laws of Motion." <http://csep10.phys.utk.edu/astr161/lect/history/newton3laws.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, online.
- <sup>5</sup> Knight, Chris. "Tony Robbins CAN! System Explained." <http://ezinearticles.com/?Tony-Robbins-CAN!-System-Explained&id=5380#>
- <sup>6</sup> "Who is Dr. W. Edwards Deming?" <http://www.lii.net/deming.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Knight, op. cit., online.
- <sup>8</sup> Colvin, op. cit., p. 94, 96.
- <sup>9</sup> Colvin, op. cit., p. 94, 96.
- <sup>10</sup> Colvin, op. cit., p. 96.

