

Empowered by On-site Massage

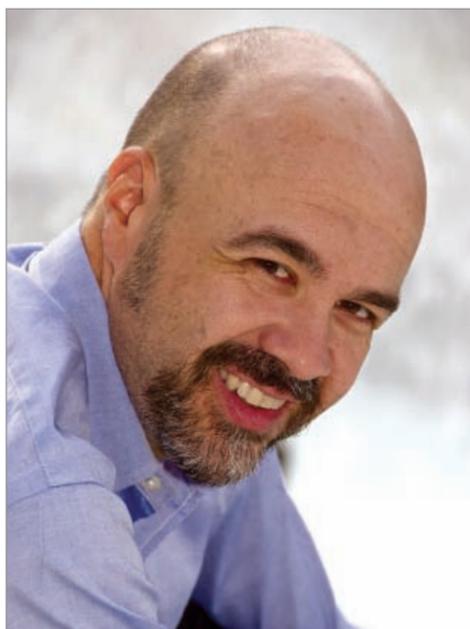
by Amanda Brauman King

I work as a massage therapist for a well-known corporation in one of its East Coast manufacturing facilities. The company employs more than 4,000 people at this site and provides an on-site medical clinic. I was hired as a massage-therapy contractor to work with people who have sustained job-related injuries, such as low-back and neck strains, tendonitis and other repetitive injuries.

I love my job because I get to work with people who rarely seek massage, because they feel they don't have time or see it as too pampering or too expensive. Many people I

massage work six to seven days a week, some of them 12 hours a day. Many of them are older than age 45. For these folks, years of doing the same physical job is taking its toll. I love being able to show them how massage can help ease their pain and increase their freedom, when in the past all they could rely on was ibuprofen, heat or ice.

One day, after I'd been with the company about six months, Mr. Brown* was referred to me by one of the clinic doctors. He was in his early 60s and in excellent health. He was a long-distance runner and had never been injured in his life—until the day before I saw him, when he had fallen off a rolling stool onto a concrete floor in the plant, landing on his right shoulder, low back and right hip. The doctor sent him out for an X-ray, which came back normal. According to company policy, less-invasive treatment—meaning me, the massage therapist—was called for before Mr. Brown could be referred to an orthopedic specialist.



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For the first time in his life, Mr. Brown was in terrible pain. And perhaps worse than his physical pain was the fear he had done serious damage to his body. Was this the end of a strong, healthy life?

Before we began the session, he stood bent in pain, unsure of his footing, and confessed these fears: he may have herniated a disc or “torn something,” and this injury might jeopardize his income and prevent him from retiring on schedule, as he'd hoped, in six months to a year. In his voice was an underlying fear: Had this accident robbed him of his bodily comfort and freedom and sent him, literally

overnight, into old age and pain?

Although he was an athlete, like most of my clients Mr. Brown had never had a professional massage. My goal was to help him relax as I began palpating to discover if soft-tissue or myofascial restrictions were the cause of his pain. I knew that if he were to remain in his fearful state it would be almost impossible for his muscles to relax, so I had him start with a few full breaths and told him to relax as much as he could. Because he was in so much discomfort, I worked on him in a massage chair, where he wouldn't have to put any pressure on the posterior side of his body.

I ended up working with Mr. Brown about eight times during a two-month period. I used a combination of Zero Balancing and neuromuscular therapy with him. Zero Balancing is a great therapy for low-back issues because it gently focuses on freeing the foundation joints of the pelvis and

increasing mobility in the spine and connective tissue. Because Zero Balancing engages mind and body, clients often feel more grounded after a session—less anxious and as if their joints have been lubricated. Neuromuscular therapy was helpful in enabling Mr. Brown's tight muscles to let go, and we also did a number of stretches for his quads and hamstrings.

By the end of our time together, I was amazed and delighted by the transformation in him. After two or three sessions, the pain in his shoulder completely disappeared, and he regained full use of his arm. This was encouraging to him and helped erase the hopelessness he was feeling about his recovery.

In time, however, the most amazing thing was the change in his attitude. Instead of fear, Mr. Brown began to show strength and confidence. Although the low-back pain lessened, it didn't go away entirely, and the clinic doctors referred him for a lumbar MRI and a consultation with an orthopedic specialist. When Mr. Brown felt the first doctor was unclear about the facts of his fall and injuries, he had no qualms about asking for a second opinion, which he got. When he came to see me for our final visit, he was standing strong—there was nothing shaky about him!

Soon he was back at work full duty. When I asked him if he was planning to retire on schedule, he replied he was feeling so good, he could probably work two more years. Although he still felt some discomfort in his back, he said, “Now I know how to manage it.”

I can't imagine any other therapy that could have given Mr. Brown such a sense of ease and empowerment through this difficult process. I have no doubt that massage and bodywork helped him take charge of his own health and stand up for himself with new strength.

**Name has been changed.*

Amanda Brauman King, L.M.T., N.C.T.M.B., is a massage therapist and certified Zero Balancing practitioner who practices outside of Boston, Massachusetts.

After receiving massage and Zero Balancing sessions for many years, she decided in 2002 to learn this work herself.

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