



Massage Ethics as a Tool for Personal Growth: An Introduction

by Rebecca Mauldin

Most massage therapists receive Codes of Ethics and Standards of Practice from various sources. These lists of guidelines and rules are helpful in setting the professional standards for massage therapy. Yet, the "rules" can be slightly different from one organization to another and, like anything in life, external rules need to be supported by internal values to be successful. When we notice ourselves in the gray areas where the rules don't seem to work, it's a good time to look inward to see what's going on.

Take, for example, the rule "don't accept gifts from clients." A lot of times we will ask, "why not, what's wrong with that?" or "do we really want to become so impersonal that we can't accept a gift?" Good questions. In a situation where a client is offering a gift and we recognize the standard of not accepting gifts, yet we want to anyway, it's time to look at ourselves. Is the desire to accept the gift based upon our perceptions of what the client needs to enhance the therapeutic relationship? Is it based upon our own needs to feel special, appreciated, or wanted? The notion that if our motivations are client based it's less of an ethical dilemma than if they are personally based may or may not apply in all situations.

So...this rule ("don't accept gifts") is pointing to the emergence of transference and countertransference issues, which are rich ground for healing. When we delve into our countertransference, we often discover unmet needs, unexplored fears and desires. This is healing because when we bring them to consciousness, we have the ability to grow and transform.

While ethical dilemmas usually aren't very comfortable, if we approach them with the willingness to look inward, we can bring a lot of healing to ourselves--a true gift!