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Ethics, Values and Principles

By Ben Benjamin, PhD

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Editor's note: This month's column is exerpted from the forthcoming book *The Ethics of Touch*, authored by Dr. Benjamin and fellow *Massage Today* columnist Cherie Sohnen-Moe.

Ethics is the study of moral principles and appropriate conduct.



This can be applied to individuals, groups or professions. In general, ethics in somatic therapies involve behaving honorably; adhering to prevailing laws; upholding the dignity of the profession; respecting each client; staying committed to high-quality care; working within the appropriate scope of practice; being client-centered; and remaining service-oriented.

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Values are tangible and intangible convictions an individual considers of intrinsic worth. Values are based upon beliefs and attitudes; they involve what is desirable, rather than what is right and correct. For example, while you know the worth of your services and believe in receiving a fair fee, you also may

value making your services accessible to everyone, regardless of their economic means, and therefore incorporate a sliding scale into your fee structure. Individuals don't necessarily agree on what is worthy as a "value" and may change their own value structure many times.

Principles comprise an individual's code of action and enable a person to behave with integrity. The person of principle modifies her or his behavior so that each action arises from a deeply held sense of self. For example, a person who acts upon the principle of honest financial dealings may be reflecting the core value of fairness and equality among people. Principles are therefore based at least in part upon one's values; they too may differ widely from one individual to another.

To be a massage therapist of the highest caliber, a practitioner must identify and be clear about what elements of professionalism are required to maintain an ethical practice. Professionalism is the quality of the image you convey. Professionalism stems from your attitudes and is manifested through your technical competency; your communication skills; your ability to manage boundaries; your respect for yourself and clients; and your business practices. The term professionalism is related to ethical behavior. High standards of action with our clients result in both ethical and professional behavior. Obviously, ethical violations are unprofessional; however, not all unprofessional behavior is unethical. For example, dressing in sloppy workout clothes when working with a client is unprofessional, but not unethical.

Click here for more information about Ben Benjamin, PhD.



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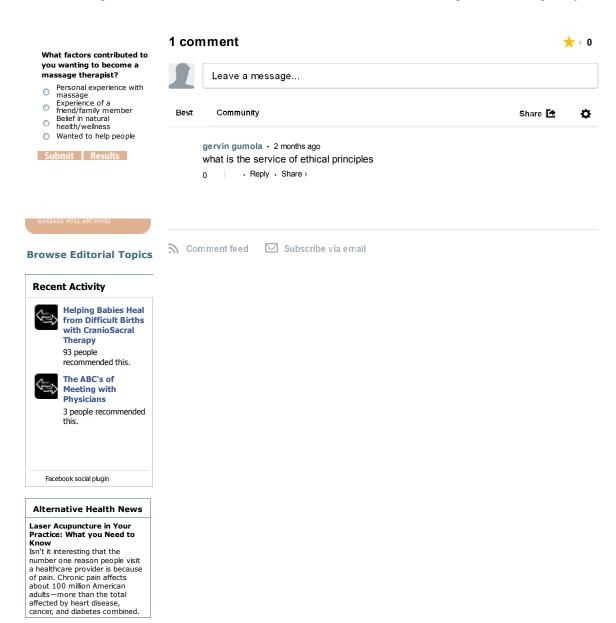
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1 of 2 4/18/2013 7:37 AM



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2 of 2