

# Notes on Principles of Tool Design for Bodywork Professionals

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**A** survey of contemporary massage tools will reveal many interesting shapes and fascinating objects. Some are good solutions to real problems. Many that look like good tools end up in the toy box or on the sculpture shelf. This has led me to think about design principles appropriate for creating tools that might be truly useful for massage and myofascial manipulation.

Some problems I've noticed among today's rather large selection of massage tools include:

Being made of materials such as wood or plastics with hard, non-resilient surfaces.

They are offered in one size only or in a limited number of sizes - say small, medium, and large.

Their use reduces contact quality by isolating the user from the recipient.

Most tools are designed to function by isolating and distancing the worker from the forces being exerted. We need the opposite effects. The challenge in our field of endeavor is to integrate the practitioner into the work and to reinforce natural, manual contact.

After all, it should prove possible to develop a set of tools that helps us do our work and provides support for direct physical contact. I suggest that there is a need for a more sophisticated interface between practitioner and client than that available by using one's bare hands and natural leverages alone. Good tool designs will share all or some of the following characteristics. They should:

- Amplify available power and give improved, more precise control
- Enable efficient application of traction and pressure
- Improve gripping ability
- Facilitate longer contact times at higher, more stable power levels
- Reinforce, normalize and minimize muscular use and development in the user
- Optimize leverages, force transfer and support
- Be customizable and easy to fit to individual users

I hope to see future tools engineered with these ideas in mind. □