

Creating Success

Julia Ireland

When I completed the basic Rolfling Training six years ago, I was extremely naive concerning what it would take for me to create a successful Rolfling practice. I had the vague impression that a "successful practice" meant working with at least eighteen clients per week and making enough money to live comfortably. I remembered Owen Marcus advising beginning Rolflers to set specific business goals and to make the business "fun". With some success, I endeavored to make the preparation and presentation of public lectures on Rolfling "fun" for myself; but for a long time I had no idea of how to increase my clientele from five to twelve people per week.

CREATING GOALS. My haphazard practice-building became more organized by doing the following exercise and by accepting critical feedback from someone who had built a very successful bodywork practice herself. This exercise helped me to

- Clarify the vision of what I wanted in a practice, i.e. set goals;
- Discover my internal obstacles to success;
- Determine steps needed to achieve my goals;
- Commit to taking the steps towards those goals I was really ready to achieve.

This exercise consists of making three lists and then refining them with the help of two people you trust to give honest and insightful feedback. The first list is a detailed picture of the Rolfling practice you want right now. For example, "I want to see X number of clients per week; I want to be paid \$X per session; I want to pay \$X in office rent; I want a secretary for X number of hours per month; I want an office facing south on X street; and I want to work X days per week, etc."

Next, list all the reasons why you *should* have what you want. "If I see X number of clients per week, I will improve my Rolfling skills and contribute in a positive way to that many people's lives. If I make X amount of money I will be able to take a vacation to X, etc."



INTERNAL CONFLICTS. Third, make a list of why you *should not* have what you want: "If I see X number of clients per week, I will have less free time; I may become physically exhausted; clients will bother me with phone calls all hours of the day and night, etc." This is your list of the internal conflicts that will impede your practice-building unless you handle them by addressing your belief system and any other constraint to your success.

As you and your two helpers review these three lists, be vigilant in spotting areas where your picture is incomplete: have you described completely the types of clients you want to work with; how those clients will find you; how much they can afford to pay you, etc. Also check your lists in terms of being realistic for the place and situation you are in and for what you are prepared to handle right now. If the going-rate for Rolfling in your area is presently \$65 per session, your plan to charge \$100 initially may be more of a challenge than your self-confidence and promotional skills can accommodate. If three clients per day now exhausts you, you will not immediately be ready to accept five or six per day. Consulting a "successful" psychotherapist or bodyworker, with whose business style you are comfortable, may also be helpful in this part of the exercise.

BRAINSTORMING. As you begin to clarify and specify what you are ready to have in your practice, some brainstorming will allow you to plan the steps to getting there. For instance, if you know you are ready and able to work consistently with fifteen clients per week, then you need an average of almost two new clients every week. This goal will lead to planning advertising, community lectures, or outreach to psychotherapists, all of which may net the referrals you need. As many Rolflers will testify, the process of clients finding you may seem mysterious or non-linear, yet predictable when clarity-of-intention has been realized. When my practice slows a little and I want new clients, I may sit down and re-write one of my ads or plan a letter or phone call to a psychotherapist from whom I want to receive referrals. Generally, before the new ad is completed or the correspondence is mailed, my phone will ring with new inquiries about Rolfling.

STABILITY & COMMITMENT. In addition to clarifying goals, many Rolflers concede that the decision to stay in one place and commit to developing a practice over time can be crucial. This along with dispelling the myth of the "rich Rolfler" helped me progress from waiting for the perfect practice to happen to taking the necessary steps toward what I wanted. After wandering around for a few years, I finally made a commitment to remain in one place and give Rolfling two years before considering a different career. Once this decision was made, six months was sufficient time to get a solid practice going. Then when I realized many dedicated Rolflers consider 15-18 clients a week to be a full practice, I began to feel I was really on my way with the 12 or 15 I had. Now I realize that the Rolflers who seem to be rich either work harder than I am willing to work or have additional income from other business ventures or family wealth. If a Rolfler sees 18 clients per week for 44 weeks per year and charges \$70 per session, the gross income is \$55,000. Spending \$15,000 to \$20,000 on business-related expenses results in a net income of \$35,000 before taxes. If a Rolfler is willing and able to

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work with more people, obviously, the income will be higher.

CREDIBILITY. I believe there are plenty of Rolfling clients in any metropolitan area if one has a workable business plan and sufficient communication skills.

Being able to speak effectively to potential Rolfling clients in advertisements, group presentations, and one-to-one discussions is important.

To communicate fully about Rolfling, it is important to know what you personally believe you can deliver as a Rolfler. Many Rolflers can comfortably make all sorts of claims about the results of the work that are simply beyond my personal experience. An inventory of what you have experienced from Rolfling along with what you have observed happen for clients, or if you are a new Rolfler, what you have seen for fellow-students and models in class, is valuable information.

Also, clarifying for yourself what is special that you bring to Rolfling and what kinds of particular physical, psychological or metaphysical transformations occur for your clients, gives a solid foundation from which to speak clearly, truthfully, and credibly about Rolfling.

SKILL BUILDING. Having had little experience in public speaking, I found it helpful to practice and get feedback from family and friends on the following:

- A general lecture on Rolfling for presentation to a group;
- Responses to commonly-asked questions about Rolfling;
- Articulation of what is unique about Rolfling as bodywork; me as a Rolfler; and the Institute with its specialized training program. This is especially crucial if you live in an area with lots of other types of bodyworkers, many of whom may have years more training and experience than you.
- A phone rap for potential clients.
- Articulation of the basic boundaries or framework rules you want to maintain in your practice. For me, these are rules I generally observe to keep my interactions with clients as positive and as free of encumbrances and inappropriate entanglements as possible.

BOUNDARIES. My framework consists of such professional rules as "I don't trade work; I don't do the first ten sessions with close friends; I keep appointments punctually; information on clients is strictly confidential, etc." This framework also prevents me from overextending myself and consequently resenting my clients. I have found when I overextend myself, even in the most well-intentioned ways (like not insisting on payment for less than 24 hours notice of cancellation) generally backfires. I presume this is because clients become uncomfortable with our arrangement if I do not respect my own stated boundaries.

As you will notice, many clients have their own boundary issues and should not have to deal with ours. The structure of your framework or business practices perhaps as much as your hands-on work, will determine whether clients return and also what therapeutic value they derive from the work. Business practices--how you return phone calls or whether you keep clients waiting, etc.--may say as much to a client as your words or touch, about how much you respect and care for him/her and your profession.

INFORMED CHOICES. Along these lines, I consider the *process* of Rolfling to be as much a part of the "product" that clients pay for, as are organized ankle hinges. I view the process of even deciding to be Rolfler potentially contributing to the deepening of self-awareness and self-affirmation that comes with the sessions themselves. My role in being with people while they are running through their issues of money, self-worth, or hopelessness/cynicism in deciding whether or not to get Rolfler, amounts to what psychotherapists call "decision counseling". As with any important decision, deciding to get Rolfler can be an opportunity to move out of being passive into realizing the ability to actively figure out what you want in life and how to go for it--not unlike the overall process I am describing in this article! Jeffrey Galper is quite eloquent on this point that any support you give to someone to make his/her decision is a service. Likewise, I concur with Jeff that our business promotional goals actually have to do with effectively educating people about Rolfling, so they can make informed choices about whether Rolfling is something that could benefit them or whether they want to pursue being Rolfler. I am not interested in selling Rolfling, since, as part of the client's whole process it is important that

s/he takes full responsibility for the decision to enter into this transformative process.

Over time, and particularly when my practice has been slow, doing personal work in the areas outlined above has taken the mystery from both "slow times" and "success". As a result, I enjoy a healthy Rolfling practice in a competitive area of the country. This process has also given me tools that I can employ with confidence in other businesses and projects in my life. □

Julia Ireland is an Adv. Rolfler in Sausalito, California. If you have questions related to the information in this article or would like a consultation, Julie suggests you contact her business partner and associate Theresa Cain at (415) 331-6816.

Rolfling in the Media

- The current issue of *Somatics* magazine includes a piece by Rolfler Will Johnson (Hornby Island, B.C., Canada) titled "Balance of Body, Balance of Mind". Peter Melchior in reviewing this first installment of a two-part article states, "It is a clear and accessible exposition of the "mind/body" interface and may go a long way toward beginning to examine the whole question of balance in a way that culminates in expression of a definition we can use. At any rate, I think it is good, and I recommend it to you. You could do a whole lot worse than to subscribe to *Somatics* too."

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- Rolfler Michael Kilmartin (Sarasota, Florida) was profiled in the July 1989 issue of *Gulf Coast* magazine. He was interviewed and pictured in the article titled "A Hands-On Profession."
- The May 1989 issue *The Light Bearer* (published by the Healing Light Center Church which is headed by the Rev. Rosalyn Bruyere in Glendale, California) included an article titled "Rolfling Movement Integration: THE MES-SAGE OF THE BODY" by Rolfler Mary Barden, M.A. (Los Angeles, California).