

Just Spell My Name Right

By Ritchie Mintz, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

It was 1979. I had been a Rolfer™ for two years and my practice was in the tank. The bills were piling up and I knew that I needed paying clients or my new career would be short-lived. Luckily, I lived in Boulder at the time, so attending the Rolf Institute's® Annual Meeting that year was a no-brainer. At the very end of the meeting, there was a summation of how Rolwing® Structural Integration (SI) was impacting the world. Then Francis Wenger stood up in the back of the room.

At that time of his life, Frank had no vocal chords. That's why everybody in the room swiveled in their chairs to face him and the crowd fell silent. Instantly, he had everyone's attention in a way I have rarely seen before or since. He surely had mine. The whole room leaned in to listen. Here's what he said in his hoarse whisper: "Rolwing [SI] is its own unique thing that is unlike anything else in the world, and it stands on its own plenty good enough just as it is."

Wow, I thought. Here was Frank, with no voice at all, whispering loud enough for all the world to hear that we – I – have something to offer a world that hurts mightily as a result of the price of living in gravity. That was when I realized why I had so much trouble articulating to people, both individually and in groups, what SI is and what it has to offer. The funny part is that it wasn't because I was inadequate as a Rolfer. Here's the thing: it wasn't until I heard Frank say it that I realized that I had completely underestimated how monumentally magical is this work.

I realized that if I were to speak of the work, I would have to be less like Dr. Rolf and more like Jerry Seinfeld. I changed my whole approach to public demonstrations. Instead of explaining the science of Rolwing SI, I told my story. My goal was not to sell Rolwing SI, but to create an attractive character with whom the audience would relate. After all, if they were in the room, the work itself had already drawn them in. All I had to do was get them to like me, and since I'm such a likable guy, it was easy and genuine.

Let me mention one point that is strictly personal and illustrates both my comfort zone and Rolf's warning to us to exert "scientific caution" in our claims. In my

presentations, I demonstrate how I see. I point out the ways and manner that gravity flows through structure and when it does not. Lo and behold, when the vectors and the painful spots coincide, the audience sees what I see and *voilà*, they're mine. (Of course, I don't leave this to chance. While I'm telling my story, I'm surveying the audience in order to choose just the right bodies to make my point.) I'm part raconteur, part seminar leader, and part standup comic.

Standup comedy looks like it's all created on the spot. It's not. Standup, when it's done well, is rigorously scripted. I only script the beginning of my public presentations. The opening words of any speech are the hardest because the audience doesn't know me, which makes me nervous. That's why I control the opening moments by asking the same question every time: "How many of you are here tonight because you were sent by someone you trust?" Then I raise my hand up high. This does several things. Those words connect the audience members to the reason they came, and they remember the person they trust who said to them, "I tried this Rolwing thing and it's good." By raising my own hand, it gives them permission to raise their hand and participate.

I then say, "Thank you. How many of you are here for other reasons?" and I raise my hand again. I thank everyone for giving up his or her time. At this point, everyone in the room has raised their hands and I have the room fully engaged. In those critical opening moments, I have asked two involving questions, connected with the entire crowd, established a safe space, and given myself time to settle down with a carefully rehearsed opening. I tell my story and the evening is off and running on my terms. That is the place from which I am able to tell how Rolwing SI is magical.

I doubt that I will ever have the attention of a room like Frank Wenger did, but Frank, if you're listening, I heard you loud and clear. Your whispered words changed my life and my practice. Since then, I began to speak of the magical plasticity of fascia, the brain, and the nervous system. As structural integrators, we have a job and an opportunity that is greater than merely doing sessions. We must educate about the

plasticity of the body to a world that is in pain and ready for relief. When we do that, we will help bring to reality Rolf's dream that her ideas would permeate society.

My Rolfer tells a story about a time long ago when some multi-level marketing scheme tried to work its way into the Rolf Institute. Dr. Rolf was dead set against using a Rolwing practice to promote anything other than Rolwing work. "Besides," our founder declared, "I don't think you [meaning Rolfers] are very good salesmen." Hmm, let me think about that. As Rolfers, we are asked to sell something that few people have heard about, that has a reputation for being agonizingly painful, and also costs a lot of money. Put that together with Rolf's exhortation – that we exert "scientific caution" with our claims – and it truly makes me wonder what, exactly, are we supposed to say about what we do? How are we supposed to advertise ourselves? How are we to sell the one thing that Rolf *did* want us to sell – Rolwing SI itself?

How is SI perceived in the world? In the 1977 movie *Semi Tough* with Burt Reynolds and Kris Kristopherson, Lotte Lenya plays Clara Pelf, a clear reference to Ida Rolf. I'm told Rolf loved that movie, saying that she would rather be parodied than reported-on. (Reported-on implies novelty while parody implies assimilation in the culture.) Our history is also rife with articles about us, some by reporters or interviewers, and some written by other Rolfers. My practicing partner, Tony Zimkowski, tells a knee-slapper about the time he did a free demonstration first session on a hometown news reporter. The next week, the local headline read "Rolwing – A Cross Between a Massage and a Mugging." There was also the Rolfer who wrote his own story about how Rolwing SI is the "fountain of youth," with his literary citation being the letters section of *Penthouse* magazine.

How is our work seen currently? In 2010, a *New York Times* print headline read: "Rolwing, A Painful Form Of Massage, Regains Popularity," with a subheading (and online article title, www.nytimes.com/2010/10/07/fashion/07rolwing.html?_r=0) calling the work "Excrutiatingly Helpful." I thought of all the years I'd tried to distance myself from the reputation that Rolwing SI has of being painful. The same year National Public Radio had a story on December 6, 2010, "Rolwing Back In Vogue, But With Shaky Evidence" (www.npr.org/templates/transcript/)

transcript.php?storyId=131735132), with the article's slant making it look like Rolwing SI is supposed to fix pathological pain, for which, they say, there is no evidence. I considered this terribly negative coverage, yet the stories lit up the Rolf Institute's website like a Christmas tree and Rolfers across the country got calls for appointments. Apparently, no matter how much our work is described as painful, people are interested.

From the *Times* article, I had wondered whether "excruciating" or "helpful" would stick, and I guess I got my answer. It reminds me of the old advertising adage, "There's no bad coverage. I don't care what you say about me. Just spell my name right." It also brought me back to how Rolf didn't think Rolfers were very good at sales. Well, Dr. Rolf, your work, as expressed through us, your heirs, is so great that it sells itself. Rolwing SI is so well-established that it cannot be extinguished, even by the worst coverage. In fact, instead of rehabbing our reputation for pain, we have cashed in on it.

The title of the *Los Angeles Times* crossword puzzle on November 1, 2011 was "That Hurts!" and the clue for 91-Down was "a four-letter word meaning 'deeply massage.'" You guessed it: ROLF. So I guess it's fair to say that we have made our way into the cultural lexicon. How are we perceived by society? It seems we do expensive deep massage that hurts like hell (but it works, except there's no evidence). And people love us.

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The Relationship of Continuing Education and Practice Building

A Dialogue

By Anne Hoff, Certified Advanced Rolfer™ and Karin Edwards-Wagner, Certified Rolfer

Anne Hoff: As we planned a theme around Practice Building for this issue, I felt it was important to discuss education. As much as it's crucial to attend to business—our websites, networking, marketing—it is also important to continue to develop professionally, and there's many ways that can directly or indirectly impact the growth and success of our practices. Karin, you take a lot of continuing education (CE) classes, and you also organize many classes for the Rolwing® Structural Integration (SI) community in the Portland area. What are your thoughts on this?

Karin Edwards-Wagner: Well, first I'd like to say that learning can happen every day in our practices, by being good scientists and observing which interventions worked, researching our questions, and simply paying attention while we are working. Classes are just one tool for learning. I definitely don't take classes for the purpose of Practice Building, but rather as a natural outgrowth of my learning addiction. Potential clients often resonate with that professional curiosity and commitment to excellence. They interpret it to mean that if you don't have all the answers, you will engage deeply with the process of learning about their particular case. It's likely to be a better investment than working with a practitioner who is brilliant but bored.

AH: Absolutely! I think classes make for fresh energy for our work, and clients sense that. As far as Practice Building, you can work that implicitly or explicitly. Implicitly, you just trust that the expansion of your skills will draw in more people who can benefit from what you learn. I've taken three workshops in the past year, and while I can't say it's strictly cause and effect, I have definitely seen a boost in my client load over that period. To work it explicitly, you can put out a newsletter or write a blog post where you mention that you have taken a class and now have new skills in a particular

field. Or you can contact a past client and say, "I've learned something that I think might help with your issue, would you like to come in and try a session?" I tend to go more the implicit route, though I do sometime mention in a blog post something I've added to my skill set. What do you do?

KW: I do mention shiny new skills in my email newsletter to my client list, but only if I have capacity to handle the extra sessions that inevitably result. This is a great strategy for creating an opportunity to practice the class material. I often manage to book the week following a class with at least ten clients who are really excited about experiencing the new information. I do sometimes specifically reach out to past clients who might find it relevant. Since this is motivated by a genuine desire to help, people seem to find it thoughtful rather than pushy. Also, I post a list of all of the classes I've taken on my website, so potential clients can see how my knowledge base matches up to their needs.

AH: You mention booking the week following class to directly apply the material. I know that was the case when you came to Seattle to study John De Mahy's lumbar-pelvic algorithm, that you had clients with pelvic issues lined up for your return. Do you tell clients ahead of time that you are about to take a class on a certain topic?

KW: In that case it was easy, because half of my clients have back or pelvic pain, so I scheduled those people for that week and everyone else had to wait a week—although I used the algorithm to check all of them too.

AH: I think John DeMahy's class is a good example of one type of CE: a very nuts-and-bolts class with specific assessment and treatment skills that hone our ability to help with particular issues. I find that when clients get quick results to their presenting issues—particularly when those issues are