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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Forget Coffee, Try a Chair Massage

In 1994, Lewis Harrison was an itinerant massage therapist giving chair massages in Central Park. In little more than a decade, he's parlayed his way to the top of the corporate massage market, both as a motivational speaker and as the founder of one of the largest onsite workplace massage providers in the country.

Lewis' New York City-based Chair Massage Company contracts with 200 massage therapists all over the United States who provide chair massages to employees of companies both large and small, as well as to conventioners and trade show attendees. In fact, corporate trade shows are Lewis' bread and butter, because it's often where he makes valuable contacts for future business. "I will do corporate trade shows that nobody wants to touch," Lewis says. "And because I'm a great networker, I will meet people who have bigger things going on."

Through his website (www.eventschairmassage.com), Lewis markets onsite chair massage as a way for companies to generate traffic to their trade show booth, as well as leave a favorable impression with prospective clients who are more likely to remember and talk about the company whose booth was offering free massages than the one that was giving away free candy.

The main reason why more and more companies are offering massage as a perk to their employees, though, is that it provides a great return on investment, according to Lewis. Chair massage takes between 15-20 minutes, can be performed without the receiver having to disrobe and doesn't require the use of oils or lotions. The chairs are designed to allow the receiver to fully relax, while providing the therapist easy access to the seven most common areas where stress is stored in the body—namely the scalp, neck, shoulders, back, arms, hands, and feet.

Lewis describes going into some busy offices where each of the employees has "got seven computer screens in front of them, and there's cans of Diet Coke scattered at their feet. I'm working on these guys who never leave their desks." However, in most work environments, massage offers a brief, yet very rewarding, break from the routine. Companies have come to realize that massage reduces on-the-job stress and increases productivity. In the long run, Lewis notes, it also reduces medical and health-care costs "because the employees smoke less and reducing their stress helps build teamwork.

When a person feels relaxed, they're less inhibited and they communicate their needs more effectively," Lewis adds.

Numerous scientific studies have borne out such anecdotal evidence. Chair massage in particular has proven to be effective in lowering job stress, decreasing blood pressure and increasing alertness in those who received regular 15-minute massages at work.

Massage therapist Carol Radzunas says that ESPN execs are apparently convinced by the research that shows the benefits of massage therapy in the workplace. Three years ago, the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy graduate began working three days a week at ESPN's Health and Fitness Center in Bristol, Conn., where she provides chair and table massage to a steady stream of eager employees, who so enjoy their company-sponsored massages that "they come to me practically crying when they forget to call for an appointment," Radzunas says.

"I've had people come to me with a headache who've said they were going home after the session, and then afterward they feel better and finish their day" at work, Radzunas adds.

She's also helped employees who are suffering from carpal-tunnel-like symptoms by finding and releasing trigger points that alleviate their pain and prevent them from having to see a doctor. Many of these ESPN employees also come for massage therapy at Radzunas' private practice in Meriden, where she is able to give them more time and attention.

Radzunas says the fast pace of doing corporate massage means "it's never dull."

"People come in constantly with new things to investigate and work on," she adds. "I've had countless people tell me that my massage is the reason they come to work. It's very gratifying to me."

ESPN currently offers 25 hours of massage a week to its employees, and every minute of that time is booked, according to Radzunas. "We just hit the end of the fiscal year and they were looking to expand the program because the response has been so positive," she says. "It's definitely here to stay."