

Do You Have the “Right Stuff” for a Career in Massage Therapy?

The holidays often leave us little time for reflection, but as the cosmic odometer clicks over to a new year, many people find themselves reassessing their life’s journey—particularly when it comes to their career path. Change is inevitable, and it can be a very good thing if one remains open to the opportunities, rather than focusing on the discomfort that often accompanies it.

Studies have shown that more than money, what provides people the most job satisfaction is feeling that they are doing work that is both meaningful and stimulating, allowing them to grow as human beings. In a 2004 survey of the Best Jobs in America, *Money Magazine* ranked a career in massage therapy in the top 20, and gave it a B+ for work that is both fulfilling and challenging. It also noted that the industry is on an upswing, with 24 percent job growth over the next decade.

The news doesn’t surprise Susan Toscano, director of admissions of the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy in Groton, a longtime massage therapist who paves the way for new acolytes to the profession. For many years Toscano has witnessed the field change and grow, and her experience has honed her insight into what qualities make a successful massage therapist. We asked her how someone might know whether or not a career in massage therapy was right for them.

How do I know if I have the “right stuff” to be a successful massage therapist?

Susan Toscano: You have to be fascinated with the human body—how it works, what makes it sick, what makes it well. You have to respect how different everyone is. You also have to be a person who believes in the general goodness of people, or at least have a desire to find the goodness in people. And, you have to want to be in the healthcare profession.

Those who are most successful are motivated in an entrepreneurial way as well. You have to be motivated to volunteer your time, put yourself out there, and be consistent with marketing. You have to be a people person; those who are more outgoing tend to be more successful.

What other professions provide skills that are easily transferable to a massage therapy career?

ST: The fields that transition well are nursing, nurse’s aides, physical therapy and PT aides, athletic trainers, and people in the service industries like hairstylists, aestheticians, nail technicians. These kinds of positions are akin to the field of massage, which can be divided into three major paths—medical, spa and athletic. That said, we’ve had mortgage loan officers and bank managers go through the program at CCMT to become successful

massage therapists. Their previous careers were not satisfying at all, at least not in a way that made them happy. In massage therapy, there's immediate satisfaction for the work that you do when a client gets off your table and thanks you for helping to relieve their stress or pain. It's that feeling you get when you see someone who really needs help and you give them your time and energy—the real payback is in how fulfilled and valued it makes you feel.

Where do massage therapists work?

ST: In addition to independent practice, the venues that employ massage therapists continue to expand beyond the expected massage therapy clinics, salons, spas and health clubs. Massage therapists are found working in assisted living facilities, hospices, in medical practices and clinics, hospitals and the offices of chiropractors, naturopaths and osteopaths. They're hired by athletic teams and corporations. The newest areas for massage therapy are infant massage and canine and equestrian massage.

What's happening now in the industry that impresses you most?

ST: The number of people in the general public who respect and understand massage therapy is growing and growing, and I don't see that as something that will decrease. More and more people are receiving massage every day. That honors the value of the work. CCMT has always been committed to promoting massage therapy as a healthcare profession.

How does one get started?

ST: Finding the right school is the first step to becoming a successful massage therapist. The training program is really the lead into what your experience within the profession is going to be like.

For almost 30 years, CCMT has been exclusively dedicated to training massage therapists. Accredited by the Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation, CCMT provides a comprehensive, quality education in a professional atmosphere that honors and promotes self-care, personal transformation and the mind-body-heart connection.

CCMT believes that personal commitment is key. When you're studying how to facilitate wellness in others, your own wellness becomes a big part of the picture. You have to be able to walk your talk. CCMT's program is about the integrity of the way you put yourself in this world.

Is there a way to see what it would be like to be a massage therapist before enrolling in a program?

CCMT offers a risk-free way of testing the waters to see if a career in massage therapy is right for you. Every month, the school hosts a half-day, complimentary Discovery Workshop at each of its campuses in Newington, Groton and Westport. At these events,

participants will give and receive massage, experience CCMT's unique learning environment, and feel firsthand the sense of community that is an integral part of a CCMT education.

How long is training, and what does one need to become licensed?

ST: CCMT understands that some students have to work and go to school, so the programs vary, with full- and part-time options. There are 7 ½-month, 12-month, 20-month and 24-month schedules, with programs for massage therapy, clinical massage and spa massage. After graduation, students in all programs are eligible to apply for the licensure exam.

CCMT ensures that its students will be thoroughly prepared for professional practice and licensure. In 2006, 98 percent of CCMT graduates passed the National Certification Exam for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork, compared to the national average of 68 percent.

But the training and opportunities for learning don't end on graduation day. CCMT graduates have access to lifetime career resources and support, including placement assistance, online massage therapist listings, job postings, business consultations and continuing education seminars.

All Discovery Workshops are from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and are complimentary. To register for an upcoming workshop, visit www.ccmt.edu or call: Newington main campus, 75 Kitts Lane, Newington, (877) 282-2268; Groton branch, 1154 Poquonnock Rd., Groton, (877) 295-2268; or the Westport branch, 25 Sylvan Rd., Westport, (877) 292-2268.