

# talk about touch

WITH MARY ANN FOSTER AND MARY KATHLEEN ROSE

## I HAVE A FEELING



Being a successful massage therapist involves not only using skillful technique, but also cultivating and using your intuition.



---

MARY KATHLEEN ROSE: On the TV show series *Cheers*, Diane, the philosophical waitress, asks Woody the bartender, “Do you believe in intuition?” He replies, “No, but I have this strange feeling that someday I will.”

MARY ANN FOSTER: I have a feeling it’s time for us to talk about intuition.

MKR: Yes. Being a successful massage therapist requires cultivating and using your intuition—the process of arriving at a conclusion without a conscious decision-making process.

MAF: When I see “intuitive massage” on a business card, I wonder what the therapist does. Isn’t everyone intuitive? Doesn’t everyone have hunches?

MKR: The opposite would be putting “rational massage” on your card. No doubt we often think of intuition as a magical process. Blink! A flash of clarity slips through a crack of cluttered thoughts.

MAF: But where does it come from? A spirit guide? The collective unconscious? A dead relative?

MKR: Perhaps. After a flash of intuition, I can usually go back and find actual sensory cues that led to a conclusion. For example, a client says, “That’s just what I needed!” Upon reflection, I realize I was drawn to an approach because I *saw* the client’s holding pattern. I *felt* the tissue. I *heard* the client’s tone of voice. I didn’t register it all in my conscious mind, but a nonconscious part of me gathers all that information, integrating it with years of experience and know-how, producing a meaningful and effective response. Intuition only comes with both experience and receptivity.

MAF: But a massage therapist can actually alienate clients or just be plain wrong by relying too heavily on intuition.

MKR: I’ve worked deliberately to develop my intuition, and my clients often validate my insights. But sometimes I have shared what I thought was a brilliant insight and been woefully wrong. Perhaps what I said was even disempowering to clients.

MAF: I know the feeling. Early on, I relied heavily on intuitive guidance. Realizing many of my insights were wishful thoughts, I experimented. Every time I got an insight, I asked clients if I could share it to see if it fit their experience. Half the time my intuitions were products of an overactive imagination.

MKR: So go ahead and give yourself credit for being 50 percent right!

MAF: I’ve since learned to discern wishful thinking from useful perceptions. In retrospect, it’s easy to mistake a fantasy or random idea for intuition when we lack knowledge. The more knowledge, training, and experience I have, the clearer my intuition. I’ve learned to focus more on clients’ experiences and to trust that useful insights—theirs or mine—bubble up at the right time.

MKR: Yes, and that is when practicing massage becomes a pure joy. Clients feel empowered because I’ve validated their awareness. Clients are happy, and I’m happy when they’re happy.

MAF: This brings up a tricky edge. Many massage therapists, including myself, get so busy *doing* that we don’t take the time to recognize what’s actually underhand; it inhibits the flow of deeper intuitive knowing. On the other hand, building your techniques and assessment skills feeds the intuitive process.

MKR: In massage education, students are often told to use their intuition before they have sufficient ground to trust it.

MAF: And they’re also told to fall back on intuition when they really don’t know what they’re doing. For example, a friend went for a relaxation massage. Instead, based on the therapist’s “intuition,” she received deep and painful massage. She told me, “Normally, I’m an assertive person, but when I’m on the massage table, I’m vulnerable and afraid to speak up.”

MKR: I ask my client, “What do you need today?” The client says, “I’m in your hands. You know what to do.” But what if I don’t? Even though this can be an uncomfortable moment, I’ve learned that it’s really okay to *not* know. As I’m willing to let go of my preconceived agenda, the session begins to flow.

MAF: Perhaps that’s the ground of intuition. Be willing to let go, trust that you know what you really know, and enjoy as the session continues to flow. **m&b**

 *Mary Ann Foster, BA, CMT, has been practicing and teaching massage and movement in the Boulder/Denver area since 1981. She has diverse trainings in movement and structurally integrating therapies, teaches at the Boulder College of Massage, and wrote Somatic Patterning: How to Improve Posture and Movement and Ease Pain (EMS Press, 2004). [www.emspress.com](http://www.emspress.com).*

 *Mary Kathleen Rose, BA, CMT, has a background in shiatsu, integrative massage, and holistic health education. She is the developer of Comfort Touch, consulting to hospices and other medical organizations nationwide. She produced the video Comfort Touch Massage for the Elderly and the Ill, and is the author of a textbook of the same title. [www.comforttouch.com](http://www.comforttouch.com).*