

Professional Growth

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Professional growth can mean so many things in our industry. For example, we can take continuing education courses, participate in networking opportunities, or get bodywork from colleagues or mentors. But we all know the pitfalls of the first two options. After a CE class, we might not have the skills to integrate or market the new techniques. On the other hand, networking events can feel like a lot of small talk that we leave wondering how valuable the time spent was. I have a few recommendations for these, and at the end I'll address receiving bodywork.

Like you, I have spent a great deal of time in continuing education classes. Over my first five years of practice, I took about 600 hours of CE. Naturally, I didn't retain all of it. Even if I understood the concepts in class, I didn't always allocate the follow-up study hours to bring the new learning to my table. But when I started taking Zero Balancing classes (and really found my stride), I discovered a tool that changed my post-CE routine: repeating a class. Zero Balancing's first two classes are Core I and Core II; in my first four years as a ZB student, I took Core I six times and Core II twice. Because this material really excited me, I wanted not just to know it but to master it. With each class I learned something new, settled into a more mindful practice, and developed the language skills I needed to communicate what I was doing and why people should come to me. In the process, I got certified and am now in teacher training so that I can teach my own Core I and II classes.

Repeating the course was an experiment that worked beautifully! By developing an ongoing connection with the material, I created a pathway to success, and I know you can do the same thing. So take entry level CE courses until you find something that really turns you on, then repeat the class and dive in! There is more to gain than the modality itself. In his ground-breaking book *Flow*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi gives us a window into the benefits of finding endeavors that feed us. "Contrary to what we usually believe...the best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times. The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something that we *make* happen." Recognize flow in your own pursuits, and you will find skills that serve your whole life.

As for networking, I admit I go round and round with best practices. But I've settled into a series of fun tasks you might find helpful in your own networking:

1) Ask innovative and fun questions that help people sparkle.

So instead of a bland, "What do you do?" ask, "What excites you about being a (massage, finance, corporate...) professional?" You'll invite an answer that starts a real conversation, for instead of merely hearing what they do, you'll learn about their values.

2) Assume you'll meet people again and invite them to participate in other activities you value.

If they're not interested in anything you love, they're probably not a great lead for you—so move on. On the other hand, when you discover a slew of mutual friends or common passions or values, get their card; and

3) CALL (not e-mail) them to connect.

I'm not always available to pick up the phone, but since I get about 150 e-mails a day, I'm not looking for another pen pal—I want to get to know a colleague. So pick up the phone and make a specific proposal in your phone message: "Hey, it was great to meet you Monday. My practice is in the Eastlake neighborhood, and tomorrow I'm headed to a great coffee shop across the street to study in the early afternoon. Let me know if you'll be in the area so we can connect." It is unrealistic to always expect such meetings to occur on the first try, but initiating concrete communication creates momentum, and eventually the rendezvous happens—without feeling like a boring game of phone tag.

Regarding bodywork: Yes, do it! As regularly as possible. Receiving regular bodywork or psychotherapy or spiritual guidance or whatever crosses your path is quite probably the best professional growth available. Anything that aids you in being fully present in your own work is a worthwhile project that nurtures you professionally and personally. Getting to know ourselves is a lifelong job, and the more clarity we have as we move through the world, the more we bring to our work. Besides, it feels good!

Want to know more? Read *The Four-Fold Way* by Angeles Arrien, Ph.D. Happy growing!



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