The Frequent Session Program

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by Coach Cary Bayer

A couple of years ago, my wife and I flew from Ft. Lauderdale to Los Angeles, then to Melbourne, Australia, and after that to Singapore. On the way back, we headed from Bangkok to Melbourne, then back to L.A, and from southern California to southern Florida. All these flights were either first class or business class. The remarkable thing about this exotic and long-distance itinerary is that these journeys didn't cost me a penny; they were all "paid" for by American Airlines, or by one of their partner airlines around the world as part of American's frequent flyer program.

Like every other airline in the U.S., American runs an awards program to give back to its loyal customers. Theirs is the longest running, having taken off--no pun intended--in May of 1981. More than thirty years later, there are more than 92 such frequent flyer/guest programs. Suffice it to say, American Airlines' program has been a huge success for the airline and their passengers.

As a flyer, you have many choices of carriers to fly with--the flight attendant even says just that as you "deplane." The airlines, therefore, are grateful that you choose them and not a competitor. To reward you for that, and to inspire you to continue to fly with them, they give you free flights. Restaurants, bookstores, and other industries have similar programs. Why shouldn't healers of all stripes?

That's a rhetorical question. As the business coach for massage therapists I teach them to incorporate a Frequent Massage Program to reward their loyal clients. The same kind of program could be adopted by most every kind of healer. I recommend a free session to clients after they've had 10 sessions that they've paid for at the one-at-a-time fee. The giving back of 10 percent is common in many industries, where businesses give finder fees for referred business. (Giving back 10 percent also has several millennia of history in spiritual circles.) Twenty million airline award tickets were given away in 2004, and, as of 2009, some nine trillion seventy seven billion miles have been accumulated since the frequent flyer programs began; that's one million trips from the earth to the sun. I don't know how many free massages and healing sessions were given away in the past 30 years, but I'm afraid that the number is far too few.

The logistics for tracking these free rewards sessions can be done with a card that gets clipped or signed after each session, or through recordkeeping in the client's file. After that ninth session, you can be sure that your client will book session number 10 as soon as possible; that's because session number 11 is on the house, and they can't wait to get their free treatment. In case you hadn't noticed, people love to get things for free--whether they're samples of new products or your healing work. Your clients will love you for this, and they'll fly your friendly healing skies--or tables--for years to come.

When I bring up this idea of the Frequent Massage Program at my "Build a $100,000 a Year Massage Business" continuing education workshops, quite a number of massage therapists get agitated by the idea of giving away something for nothing. They were taught that if you give something away for free, people don't regard it highly. While this is true in principle, it's important to make the distinction that this isn't something you're giving away to someone who doesn't value your work--this is something you're giving away to someone who values your work so much that he's already paid full price for it 10 times. You're simply thanking him for that loyalty.

Far too many massage therapists feel weird about borrowing the marketing and promotional ideas of other industries, as if doing so will somehow tarnish them with the negativity associated with much of Corporate America. If the bath water is dirty, as the proverb goes, simply let it down the drain; you don't need to throw the baby away with it. A healing modality is an art but, because people pay therapists for that art, it's also a business. What works for businesses in one industry, can also work for businesses in another. If 92 different frequent flyer programs are in place, it's clearly a win/win promotional tool in the airline industry. There are far more healing arts businesses up and running in America every day than there are airlines flying, and yet I'm reasonably certain that there are far fewer than 92 Frequent Healing Arts Programs in place in this country. It's a new millennium; it's high time that alternative therapists take advantage of marketing and promotional tools at their disposal that give them a competitive edge.

Allow me to explain. When American Airlines introduced its frequent flyer awards program in 1981, consumers were thrilled with the prospect of free flights as a reward for their brand loyalty. Naturally, other carriers scrambled to come up with their own version of a program. But before any of them did, American had a huge leg up on their competitors--the entire flying public saw American as a good guy who wanted to give back. You can't buy that kind of good will. (Then, when marketing partnerships were created with credit card companies, as well--wherein consumers would be rewarded with one mile for every dollar they charged on their plastic--a whole new win was created for the public.)

The Frequent Healing Program is so rarely employed, that if you adopt it today, you'll have a competitive advantage over the other therapists and healers in your area. As clients start enjoying their free sessions from you and tell their friends about it, you may wind up with the clients of other therapists who have no such program. Very few do; so you can enjoy your competitive advantage.

Nothing aids the box office success of a new movie more than the word-of-mouth free advertising that we, as moviegoers,

provide by telling our friends about this great new film that they just have to see. Word-of-mouth is also the way that most healing arts businesses gain new clients and grow. And nothing brings about word-of-mouth advertising from clients more than when they're happy with your work. A free session is one wonderful way to make a loyal client a happy client.

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