



Member Profile

By Sean Eads

Linda Penkala Laurel, Maryland

Linda Penkala decided to double-down when it comes to the business of massage, running two private practices at the same time. She owns Optimum Health for Life (OHL), a wellness center dedicated to essential oils and massage therapy, and Corporate Pit Stop (CPS), which specializes in on-site massage for employees. This MT knows how to jockey for position in a competitive field—literally.

Married and with four children, Penkala attributes her success to her family and God. She believes strongly in the power of prayer and she credits God for the twists and turns that led her to the business of massage therapy. “It was pure Divine intervention,” Penkala says, regarding the timing of her first job as a hot walker at New York’s Belmont Park in 1974. Hot walkers take the horses around to cool off after racing. Penkala moved quickly into racing itself and, by the early 1980s, she had become one of the top five women jockeys in the country. She was invited to represent the United States in Japan’s prestigious Ladies Cup International Race in 1982. She spent three weeks at three tracks, riding, traveling, and doing a lot of public relations work.

“Along the way of that success, I chose to work hard, keep my moral compass, and present myself professionally at all times. I let my actions speak louder than my words and let my heart and hands work in harmony for the best outcomes,” Penkala says.

These attitudes prepared her for life as an entrepreneur. Working with horses helped her develop the intuition massage therapists prize when working with clients. Once Penkala started a family, she moved away from the grueling physical demands of horse racing. A weekend course at a community college reignited her interest in massage and bodywork, something she had been introduced to as a young girl.

Penkala also credits the influence of her grandmother, a nurse who was very much in tune with the natural world. “My Filipino grandmother, Soledad, was my early childhood mentor and responsible for my holistic thinking,” Penkala says. “She was holistic in the ’50s and ’60s—way before the word was even coined.”

She attended the Center for Stress Reduction in Washington, D.C., under the guidance of LMT and acupuncturist Marlene Elbin. She has trained in multiple modalities, including medical and infant massage, and specializes in deep therapeutic massages.

Penkala’s business success is particularly interesting because her two companies involve different demographic bases and business models. Both demonstrate the power of targeting and developing niche markets and the contributions of dedicated,



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passionate employees. She started Optimum Health for Life in 1988 to promote the power and benefits of essential oils, a market that has grown significantly over the past 21 years. OHL is now a bricks-and-mortar wellness center with two treatment rooms and functions like a typical massage center.

She developed Corporate Pit Stop in 1997, inspired by a college class on stress management in corporate environments. CPS focuses on massage outreach to businesses who contract CPS to provide 15-minute on-site chair massages for employees, usually in quiet conference rooms, on a monthly basis. This business model is pitched perfectly in an era of high insurance premiums and increased demand for worker productivity. Employees are allotted a 15-minute break anyway, so why not let them use it in a way that makes them feel better about themselves and their job?

Penkala uses charity events, networking, and promotions to grow her businesses. Every entrepreneur knows the importance of both maintaining an existing client base and acquiring new customers. Penkala has found holiday newsletters to be one effective way of keeping in touch with clients. She distributes ABMP’s *Body Sense* as a holiday gift to customers—a way to remind them of good health habits and her services. Penkala also developed a terrific marketing tool using the principle of regifting. “I ... give all my clients at Christmas time a free half-hour gift certificate that they can give to someone who has never been to my office. Over time, they have generated many new clients.”

Regardless of the kind of massage business you wish to begin, Penkala stresses the same message. “Getting foot traffic has to be a top priority.” She suggests steeply reducing your rates at first, particularly during an economic crunch, exchanging short-term pain for long-term gain. “It takes years and dedication to grow a business into a viable, profit-making, and long-lasting entity,” Penkala says.

The bottom line for all you inspired MTs out there? Stay alert to the latest industry trends, take a few business classes here and there, and remember that being in business is always a horse race.

Sean Eads is a freelance writer and reference librarian living in Denver, Colorado.