

By Sean Eads

Randy Heaps Rancho Cucamonga, California

In a way, the goal of massage therapists is to make sure their clients have the green light to pursue their endeavors by promoting balance and healing. For practitioner and educator Randy Heaps, life went from green to red in a split second. The current president of the Massage Cupping Therapy Association (MCTA), Heaps was a traffic signal electrician for five years before a work injury nearly crippled him and led him to have spine surgery. As Heaps explains, it ended up being a fortunate fall.

How did your accident lead you to become an MT?

My first massage was just prior to my surgery and it was life changing. The relief I got was unreal and helped in a way I could never fully explain. I wanted to do the same thing for other people. My surgeon was unsure that I would be successful in the massage field, and here I am today, 10 years later.

Had you considered massage before that?

My family often told me I had the hands of my late grandfather. When my uncle was dying of cancer, my father and I stayed with him for a week and I would massage him with regular hand lotion. He told me it made all the difference and that I should quit electrical work and get into massage therapy so I could help people. We joke that he caused my accident from the great beyond so I'd be forced to get out of the electrical trade.

What is cupping? How did you become president of the MCTA?

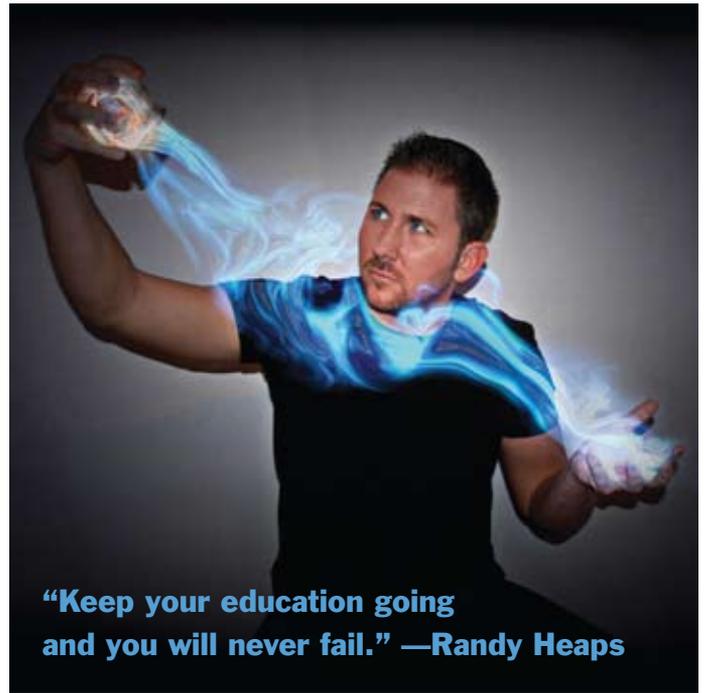
Cupping uses suction to loosen connective tissue and drains excess fluids and toxins. Anita Shannon, creator of Massage Cupping, trained me and formed the association. At MCTA's first meeting a year ago, she suggested I be its first sitting president. I was floored. I want to take Massage Cupping to unheard of levels.

Tell us about your experiences leading up to that moment.

Starting out, I had a very difficult time getting clients. Standing 6'4" and being male, it was a little rough convincing people to get on my table. If it weren't for my first teaching job at Southern California School of Massage, I'm not sure my client base would have grown as quickly as it did. My main focus is teaching and education. Most of my time is spent at the School of Holistic Touch.

What advice do you have for people starting out, especially in a difficult economy?

Start off with people you know. If you're good at what you do, word of mouth will travel fast.



"Keep your education going and you will never fail." —Randy Heaps

How can massage schools prepare students for the field?

The massage school I work at is owned and run by massage therapists. We love our craft and we love passing down our love for this industry to our students. I think it's important for them to see the excitement we have for it. I think it gets them excited to learn and go out and become amazing massage therapists.

What form of marketing stands out to you?

Talking to people like a friend rather than trying to sell massage therapy as a product helps more than anything. I don't want to come off like a car salesman. Your personality and first contact with a potential client is key to a successful practice. I found that giving them a "friend" label instead of a "client" label has worked better than anything. People need human touch and they need to be treated like a person, not a body.

What's your best tip for business success?

Consistency and education. Don't ever let your craft falter. Show people how much you love your work by giving each and every person the best massage you can. Above all, keep learning about the massage industry. There is so much for all of us to learn. Keep your education going and you will never fail.

How has ABMP helped you with your practice?

ABMP went way above and beyond for me. When I learned and started teaching and practicing Massage Cupping, it was not covered by ABMP's insurance. They really fought for me and all the other Massage Cuppers out there to get it included. In my national ads, I feature ABMP's logo and e-mail address. It's important to me that every massage therapist out there knows that ABMP is a company that will stand behind you, work with you, and inspire you all in one.

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

Note: ABMP now provides insurance coverage for vacuum massage cupping.