Many Companies Hire Massage Therapists

The Complete Guide to Finding the Perfect Fit

By Cherie Sohnen-Moe

TIME TO READ: 9 MIN

Massage therapy is a strong career field. In 2016, it was estimated there were 160,300 jobs for massage therapists in the U.S.[1]

Fifteen years ago, the number of actual job opportunities for massage therapists was limited, and those working as employees often complained about the amount of time they sat around because their schedule had huge gaps.

That has changed.

There are numerous available jobs, and most places that hire massage therapists keep their therapists booked. While a large number of therapists maintain a part-time private practice in addition to a job, many therapists are fully booked at their place of employment and have no desire to market and operate their own business.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there was a 26 percent projected increase between 2016 and 2026. The site states that in 2017, the median per-hour rate was $19.23, or $39,900 per year.

You have to be cautious in looking at statistics like this. For instance, that $19.23 per hour might be low, as it does not include non-reported tips and benefits, and the yearly pay was calculated by multiplying the hourly pay by the number of hours in a typical full-time job (2,000). Yet, most therapists do between 15 to 25 hours of hands-on work per week. Also, I suspect that a high percentage of those 160,000 jobs are part-time.

The main employers of massage therapists are massage therapy franchises (Massage Envy alone employs more than 25,000 therapists), spas, hotels and medical practices. Unfortunately, some therapists working in the latter venues are often independent contractors and not employees.

Do Your Initial Research

Start your employment search by looking through the help wanted sections in trade journals and online job posting sites. I did an internet search by typing in "massage therapy jobs" and found numerous job banks—many of which allow you to search by city or state.

One national site listed almost 9,000 job openings. When I added my city to the search site, the links were still mainly job banks, but they were filtered to local job openings.

The larger spas will most likely have online employment applications through their websites. If the ones where you want to work don't have that option, contact them directly and ask them about their job application process for hiring massage therapists.

You can also contact the local franchises—which are frequently looking for new employees—to inquire about their openings and their application process.

Check with local massage schools to find out if they have any job postings or job fair events coming up. Contact school faculty and alumni to see if they have any openings in their practices. If you're unable to get a list, then perhaps you can write a "position wanted" post in alumni social media groups. You can also post your resume on professional online bulletin boards. Be sure to keep your LinkedIn profile updated.

1 Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook: Massage Therapists, https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/massage-therapists.htm

Conduct informational interviews to gain valuable insights into different work environments and the people who work in each.

Check your professional association's website for job postings; if none exist, you can often find contact information for practitioners in the area where you wish to practice. Network. Talk to people and let them know you're available and ask for leads. Message everyone you know and tell them you are looking for a job. (Don't be discouraged if the majority of people don't respond.)

Also, it's OK to remind people about your request as long as you don't do it more than once a week. Remember, quite often it's who you know that gets you the job—and it only takes one person.

Conduct informational interviews to gain valuable insights into different work environments and the people who work in each. These interviews are also a way to make valuable contacts; people may remember you when there is a job opening down the road.

Before you start the formal interview process with employers, meet with several practitioners and managers who work in the type of settings you're targeting in your job search. Most people are willing to schedule a half-hour to share insights and guide you in your research. (Offering to treat them to coffee or tea, or to bring a beverage and a snack to their office, never hurts.)

Ask such questions as:

- What are the attributes of practitioners who have been most successful here?
- How would you describe communication between management and staff?
- Is there a strong team environment? Are there regular staff meetings?
- What do you think is the most challenging part of this work environment?
- What do you like best about working here?
- What types of clients tend to frequent this establishment?
- How are practitioners expected to interact with clients in addition to the actual treatment? Should they greet clients and place follow-up calls?
- What advice do you have for doing the best job possible and developing a career in this setting?
- What advice do you have for adjusting to this environment and management, such as information regarding rules and personalities?
- How does the process for hiring massage therapists work? Are there several rounds of interviews or just one?

Get to Know the Companies

The more you know about a company, the easier it is to determine where to apply and ultimately, the more prepared you will be to excel in your job interview.

Assemble a list of potential employers and create a profile for each company.

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Note the addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and the names and titles of the people who have hiring authority for each potential employer.

Gather background information for each potential employer so you can compare your options. Find out things such as:

- Website address
- Owner/manager/director's name
- Years in business
- Years in present location
- Other locations
- Types of wellness services offered
- Types of products sold
- Number of practitioners currently employed
- Desired number of practitioners
- Company's target markets
- Company's mission statement
- Company's image and standing
- Company's differential advantage (features of their services that are unique to that company)
- Company's reputation
- Organizational structure
- Major competitors
- Type of employment status (full-time, part-time, independent contractor)
- Compensation package (e.g., wage range, insurance, vacation pay)
- Job description (including expectations of what you're to do when not performing hands-on work)
- Unique skills or attributes you can bring to this business

Review the items in the profiles you created, noting the aspects that interest or inspire you, as well as aspects that flag potential conflicts of interest. Once you have narrowed down your choices of potential employers, drive by the locations to get a better sense of each company. Is the building attractive? Is it easy to find? Is it in a safe area?

Ideally, go inside to get a fuller perspective. Is the waiting area comfortable? Is it bustling with people or calm? Are you greeted courteously? Do the staff and practitioners appear to get along well? Notice the ambience and determine if you would be comfortable in that environment. For instance, is the image clinical, posh or more bohemian?

Find a Good Fit

The key to happiness in an employment position is to work for a company where you support their mission and are comfortable with their operating procedures. Working for a company often requires conforming to a set image and

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structuring your treatments to align with the company's schedule, policies and philosophy.

For instance, are you able to set your own schedule or are you required to work specific days or shifts? Find out how long the typical session lasts and how much time is allotted between clients for you to turn over the room, update client files and take a quick break. Ideally, you want to get a job that allows you to work at a comfortable pace and style.

Is the dress code casual, or do the practitioners and staff wear specific colored clothing or uniforms? As an example, a therapist I know quit her job, a job she really liked, because they instituted a uniform policy that required wearing a polyester top and scrub bottoms. She has very sensitive skin and polyester had previously given her a rash. Also, she is petite and would have needed to tailor the pants. The company wouldn't make any exceptions.

Before accepting an employment offer from any company, determine if it attracts the type of clients you want. Consider the people who frequent these establishments, the kinds of services they require and the manner in which they expect to be treated. Let's say you really enjoy doing massages that are flowing and work the entire body. In that case, it wouldn't be wise for you to work in a clinic where you would mainly be required to perform 20-minute, site-specific massages.

Most spas and clinics sell products; many require therapists to sell a certain amount of products. Others base bonuses and advancement on those sales. Check out their product lines to be sure you are comfortable with recommending at least some of them.

The stage where you will be able to fully determine if a company is a good fit occurs during the actual job interview process. Be aware of the impression you get when you interact with people in the company. Observe carefully, consult your research and talk with trusted advisors—then follow your instincts.

You can gain confidence by interviewing with places you don't think you want to work—you get the interview practice, and you might discover they are a better fit than your initial research suggested.

Keep in mind that sometimes when you're first starting out, finding your dream job may not happen right away. However, in time, the right door will open for you as you build your skills and expertise. So keep a clear focus on finding your ideal employer. Ⓜ

Cherie Sohnen-Moe (sohnen-moe.com) is an author, business coach, international workshop leader and successful business owner since 1978. She has served as a faculty member at a massage school, acupuncture college and holistic health college. Sohnen-Moe is the author of *Business Mastery* and *Present Yourself Powerfully,* and co-author of *The Ethics of Touch.* She is a founding member of and is the past president of the Alliance for Massage Therapy Education.

Read "Beat the Recruiters at Their Own Game: How to Ace Your Massage Interview," by Cherie Sohnen-Moe at massagemag.com/current-issue

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