

Ep #104: The Art of Observation: The Surprising Key for Reducing and Eradicating Pain



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With Your Host

Susi Hatelty

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

With this episode I want to dig into one of the most fundamental concepts that I teach to both my clients and the professional teachers that I train. When people understand this concept, they move from being someone who is at the mercy of their pain or symptoms to someone who has control, but not in a grippy way. But in a way that they can really be clear about what's going on in their body and their mind.

And as a professional teacher or trainee, they really begin to see their clients truly as whole and complete. They recognize what actually needs to change, and they start to see their results grow by leaps and bounds. They're truly meeting their clients where they're at.

The concept has nothing to do with anatomy, nothing to do with biomechanics, and it has nothing to do with meditation. It's not knowing all of the yoga techniques, or stretches, or possible processes or templates that you can do with someone. Or knowing the contraindications around exercises or techniques which are good or maybe not good.

What it is, is it's the power of observation. And more succinctly, it's the art of observation. The ability to see truly what's going on in a client. And if you are a student, it's the ability to see what's going on in yourself. When you are able to tune into the parts of the body and your mind and what they are doing, what they are not doing. And observing what's going on in your mind, what it's doing, what it's not doing, noticing the emotions that are arising or not arising, and you're able to be with all of it, you start to see more clearly the patterns that are contributing to the way that you're feeling.

And as a professional yoga teacher, not only are you doing that in relationship of watching your clientele, you're also watching your own self.

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Because as we know in the healing relationship, the healing relationship when it's a professional teacher and the client coming together, that they are bringing their own world into the space and you are bringing your world into the space. And what fills that space has a huge impact on the healing relationship and on the trajectory of healing.

I mean, we all know it, we've all been to practitioners who we can tell are listening. And we've also been to practitioners who we totally know are not, and it feels decidedly different. The thing that's interesting is for you as the client, the student, if this is you, then that's the relationship with your own self. So if you're not actually paying attention and listening to your own self, that part of yourself, and I realize this sounds a bit woo-y, but that part of yourself will know that you're not listening.

So it's the exact same thing. In one case, it's the relationship between the professional trainee and their client or student. In the other case it's you and yourself and that relationship you have with yourself.

The reason why this is super important, and actually really quite fun, is because you begin to see just how simple, not necessarily easy all the time, but how simple it is to shift up the relationship in order to shift up the results, both for yourself as the student and yourself as the professional. Because as I just mentioned, the relationship that one has with their client or student, or oneself has a huge impact on what happens.

I like to say that a stat that I read way at the beginning of my career was that the degree to which a patient takes their medication is proportional to the amount of trust that they have of their physician. It has nothing to do with the medication being beneficial or not, it was the level of trust they had with their doctor. And hearing that or reading that way back when I was first starting to teach, it really resonated with me. And I knew that I had an important role to play in how I showed up with my clientele.

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So that is what this episode is all about. How are you showing up with yourself? How are you showing up with your clients? And how can we grow this capacity to really be? How can we grow this capacity to observe well? And I'm going to go through four ideas that you can toy with and explore.

I want to give you one really clear example of how this shows up. And it's not with a client, but it was with one of my kids when they were two years old. So I have a set of twins, boy and girl twins. And when my boy was two, same with my daughter, he had this phase of biting. I did what every new mom or many new moms would do, which is like stop biting. Of course that didn't work.

So then I started to pay attention to what happened before the biting and what I saw was this little kid who was having this huge energy buildup in his body, who obviously had no idea what to do with it and what came out was biting.

So then when I started to see that I could say, okay, what's happening here? And I could simply say to him, "Hey, buddy, what's going on?" And he would just sort of look at me. And then we started to recognize, oh, that he either needed a hug, or he needed to go for a nap, or he needed something to eat.

What became really interesting is as I intervened at that level, we started to really see that he was hangry and started to intervene there, the biting went away. But what became even more interesting is that then we could see the signal before the signal, so the signal before the hangry. And he was able to tune into himself even more. So he was able to acknowledge what was going on because I, as his mom, was able to help him acknowledge it.

That's the power here. So we're helping people tune in to the thing before the thing, where the thing is the symptom, super important to pay attention to the symptom. But as we want to get past that, and really get to a place where we're not at the mercy of the symptom, that we have more control of

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what's going on within our system, we want to get to that place of the thing before the thing. Okay, so that's what we're going to do with this episode.

So there are four key things that we need to work with to help improve the power or the art of this observation. The first characteristic is objectivity. Remaining objective is really, really important. Our thoughts and our feelings can distort what we're seeing. And that can shift how we're responding. So notice when you are noticing. Notice what's going on, take a moment and also notice what you're thinking about what it is you're noticing. There's a lot of noticing in that, right?

So you're observing, you're noticing what's going on. And you're noticing what you're thinking about what's going on. You might even notice what you're thinking about what you're feeling. Notice what emotions are there, do your best to simply notice. And yes, I recognize a lot of times our thinking and some of those feelings are under our level of awareness and we can't tune into them. That's all right, just take the time and the practice.

It's just taking that intentional time to pay attention to notice and that will start to grow your capacity, it's really a skill that we can grow. When you think about it, we move so quickly within our society, that to take that pause and that moment to notice, it's just not a skill that we cultivate on a regular basis. So truly, it's a skill.

And as you grow it for yourself, you're going to start to see how it really, really benefits. You'll begin to see more clearly the symptom, and as I mentioned a moment ago, you'll begin to see the thing before that symptom, like the thing before the thing. You'll be able to better access that so you'll be able to better intervene there. You'll gain more sustainability with the change that is occurring.

You'll recognize when your opinion starts to really filter in and impact things, and when you can really and truly be with the facts of the situation.

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Because so often our opinions about the matter can get in the way of the facts. And our opinions can feel very, very right. Very, very true.

The way that you know that you're in an opinion place, and not a fact place is that if you were to present your opinion, that you think is fact but it's not, you put it into a court of law, the plaintiff and the defendant would not agree. That is when you know you have a fact, the facts are that the plaintiff and the defendant will agree. The opinion about the fact is different, but the fact themselves is what is key.

So the more you can get clear on the fact and then notice your opinion about it, notice your thinking about it, notice the emotions about it, then you start to get a greater understanding of the dynamic of what is happening. Now sometimes people will say, Well, that is a lot of work.

And initially it is, but the work is really worth it because now you're not just looking at yourself as uni-dimensional I've got pain thing, you start to see all the contributing factors to it. And as you grow this ability to be objective, you really start to see more of the nuances that are contributing to what is going on.

The second characteristic that you can grow is focused attention. Focused attention allows you to gently notice what you're noticing. So where objectivity is noticing, yes, and starting to cultivate the distinction between objective and subjective opinion and fact, now you start to bring in focused attention. And that is a gentle noticing of the noticing.

And so if you're doing this with yourself, something really interesting starts to arise, and it's going to sound a little woo-y, but it's as if there's this inner sense of self that notices when your noticing. And something happens that's a little like what happens with a child when that child is noticing.

When they notice that you're noticing, something starts to change within them. The child starts to notice that we are deeply interested in them. And

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much like that child who notices that there's a deep interest in them, the same thing happens with our own inner self, maybe you call it spirit, maybe you call it soul, but there's something inside that shifts. The same thing happens with clients.

We've all had the experience, as I've mentioned earlier, when we've been with a physician, or a physical therapist, or an osteopath, or any other professional for that matter, who didn't listen and you can feel them not listening. Whereas you also know what it is like when that professional truly is focused, gently focused on you. You can feel that distinction.

So the idea and a question I want to offer up to you is, can you allow that focused attention to be on yourself in a kind and loving way? Can you place that focused attention on your client in a kind and loving way? And if you are the professional teacher, you'll be doing it to yourself as well, the kind and focused attention on yourself as you place that kind and focused attention on them.

The beauty as the professional teacher, as you start to grow this capacity, you become a model of what is possible. And that naturally, almost through osmosis, has an impact on the client and the client starts doing it more for themselves.

The third is appreciation. This is when we can allow for acknowledgment and gratitude for the moment that is arising. Even if it's frustration, worry, concern, annoyance. Even if it hurts. It's like thank you, body, for telling me that something is up. Or when there's an individual or a client that the professional teacher is working with and it's, okay, all right, thank you. Thank you for being the way you're being and however you're responding.

There's this really lovely nuance of gratitude, appreciation, of acknowledgment for what is actually going on. And when you do that, when you're paying attention and being objective, when there's that focused attention along with this appreciation and gratitude, that innately slows you

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down. But not in a way that, “Ugh, I have to stay slowed down,” but there's a meaningfulness at the pace that you're working.

There's a consistency to the pace, there's an ease to the pace. There's an overall ability to see at 15,000 feet, rather than being at ground level. There is an ability to shift from being in a zoomed out 15,000 foot place, and then going back to ground level and getting granular if needed. In other words, you're able to zoom in and zoom out because you're not going too fast. You're able to see so much more because of the pace that you're going.

So when you can be combining these characteristics of objectivity, of focused attention, and of appreciation, that slows you down to a place where now you can actually simply wait. And in that space of waiting, there is an infinite patience. Not in that way that people talk about patience, where it's like, “Okay, I better buckle down and wait.” No, I don't mean that at all. I mean that there is an ability to bear witness. There's an ability to simply be.

There's much less of a desire to be at fight with your body. You get to see that your body is actually giving you all the information that you need, that your body is a barometer, it's a messenger. You don't have to fight to bring it back on board, because it's been on board the entire time. You're looking at it, and you're looking at the relationship between your body and your brain and your mind in an entirely different way.

Then, you simply can be, and you can choose with such more wisdom and such greater clarity. So then how do you grow this ability to observe? How do you hone the craft, this art of observation? Well, the first is simply to notice. Just take time to notice. Take five minutes out of your day and just notice what's going on. Take a moment to notice your thinking.

So many people do not notice their thinking. But just take a moment, what is your thinking saying about how you're feeling? About the situation at hand? And watch to see that the behaviors that you are experiencing or

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that a client is experiencing is a result of something, it's not the actual action. So allow yourself to step back and just pay attention. Take a moment and breathe. And tune in and know that your body is on board.

And an interesting exercise that you can do with your body is this, notice yourself breathing. And you can place your hands on your face, or on your chest, on your belly and just feel your inhale and exhale. Notice the relative tension that already exists here. Notice how your breath is moving in your body. Notice where the ease exists in your body. So just notice all that's there.

And then take a look about five feet in front of you, whether it's on the floor or on the wall, but look at something that's not moving. And focus exclusively on that point. And what happens to the tension in your body, the ease in your body, and the breath? How does the quality shift or change?

Okay, now do the same thing, look at that point. Now be a bit more inclusive. So you still see that point and you see what's around it, but you're still gently focused on that point. And what is different? So even as I walk you through it, what I'm noticing is my eyes are softer. There is more openness when I am being inclusive, versus when I am being exclusive and putting my effort all into that particular point.

So there are two different approaches to paying attention. So allow for yourself just to pay attention both from a zoomed out space, a space that cultivates ease, openness, breath.

And if this resonates with you and you would like my support, either in your training as a professional yoga teacher, or in one to one private client sessions, do reach out to me at health@functionalsynergy.com. It would be an honor to work with you and to help grow your own ability and cultivate the habit of observation. Happy exploring.

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If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com, looking forward to hearing from you.