

Ep #246: The Power of Cueing



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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.

Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here because today I want to talk about a topic I've been considering a lot lately. It's been something over the years that has come through my brain space enough times that it's worthwhile for me to now get into a podcast episode about it, and it's about the nature of cueing.

And truth be told, I've never really loved the word cueing. It strikes me that what we are actually wanting to do with cueing is much more than just providing a word or a framework with people, but rather it's a set of instructions and what really is the purpose and point of the instructions that we are offering or providing to our students or our clients.

Cues just seem to be so, to me, to be so one dimensional. There's not a lot of life to this idea of cues. And I say it that way because the number of times over the years that someone has said to me like, what are the best cues for X? Or what are the universal cues? What can I say to get a whole room to do the thing that I'm wanting them to do?

When I hear cue I don't hear relationship, and what I want this episode to really highlight are some of the ways that I think about cueing. Really how I broaden and deepen what cueing is to instructions and teachable moments and the interaction that I have with my clients and students, and how vital that interaction is to how the instructions or the cues come alive for someone so that a real difference is made.

I remember a story from a trainee who is now a grad. Years ago she worked at a studio here in town, a hot studio that had a lot of people in the room. Like one of those classes that had 40 to 50 people in the room. And she would share with me how there was this common sort of thought amongst the teachers that most students didn't really listen to the teachers and that they were just doing their own thing.

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And the teachers really are just providing these cues or this sequence or this choreography for people to move through. And it didn't really matter what you said because enough people in the room really aren't going to follow it anyway and there's nothing you can say to help them.

I found that to be interesting because to me being a yoga teacher, being a yoga therapist even because to me there's a yoga teacher in every yoga therapist if you want to be great at being a yoga therapist. But being a yoga teacher, there's a connection and an assistance to helping your student to learn technique so they can grow skill. So all of what she had just said, all of what I related to just did not compute for me.

So that really has kind of churned through me and my psyche of like what makes this idea of cueing in an instructional kind of way really, really effective? How can we really be the best teachers that we can be? I'm sure that there will be more coming around this topic in the coming episodes as I launch into these ideas that I have about what really is cueing all about.

So let's begin here. And how I will frame this particular episode is about the way that I work with it. And perhaps what I'm sharing here provides some light for you, whether you are a teacher or a health professional who's integrating yoga and you want to improve the way you're instructions are being interpreted. Whether you're a student, and maybe you're the teacher who's also the student and you're hearing what a teacher is saying that's maybe landing or not landing, and it just can start to build out perhaps a better relationship with the instructions or with the instructor or the teacher.

So let's get into it. So I think the first fundamental piece to cueing, to instruction is what we are saying, is it landing? Are the things we are saying landing for the person? And in my books that is entirely in my court. It's my job to, point one, express, share, offer, an instruction for a client that hopefully, to start with, they will understand and it will land for them. And part two of that is if it doesn't land for them, it's on me to determine what's contributing to it not landing for them.

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And that might sound like a lot of responsibility, and perhaps it is. The thing is that these are my instructions. These are my invitations, my offerings. So I have a responsibility in how they are coming across. Now, of course, what's going on for my client, for my student at any given time, there's a whole lot I cannot control over there. But I can certainly control a whole lot about, A, the wording that I use and, B, noticing how it has landed.

And if I'm circumspect about how it has landed on the other side, then I get to seek clarity for how it may have landed or not landed. And the reality is that when I'm working, whether it's a small group class that I'm running, whether it's a private one-on-one session, whether it's a group training call in my certification program, whether it's in any of the other courses that I run, I'm tuning into all of the feedback that's coming my way.

Whether it's how they are moving, whether there is more of an interaction and verbal feedback coming my way, whether I'm listening to what's being said or what's being done, but also what's not being said and what's not being done. And then that can lead me to asking more questions or providing additional instructions or cues or invitations and seeing where that goes.

So this is really important. Is what I am offering or instructing actually landing? Meaning, is what I am asking a client to be doing, is it actually being done?

Now, you'll notice that already through this episode, I have used words like instructions, asking, requesting, offering, invitations. And I think what's really important for me to be really, really clear about is that my job is that I am leading my client. And to me, my relationship with my client is a power with relationship. It's not power over.

So when I talk about leading, I'm not thinking that my client is some passive follower. That would be a power over relationship. What I'm engaging with is a power with relationship. So there's a back and forthness. So if I'm seeing a client who's not doing the thing that I was cuing or instructing to

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do, I'm not hammering on them like, why are they not doing the thing, right? Like I'm not going to say it that way. And that's not even what I'm thinking.

But I'm super curious that they're not doing the thing. I'm super curious that how they're interpreting my words are not landing. And so then that is what starts to create a really interesting dialogue and where the subjective world of what objectively is happening plays out. And what I mean by that is they have interpreted the instruction or the offer or the invitation.

And to me, all of those things are the same because when we're in a power with relationship, I'm providing some guidance and it's done in an invitation offering kind of way. So that when I'm seeing something that's not quite occurring the way I expected it to, the way that I assumed that it would, now I can start to engage with the client and find out subjectively what's actually happening for them.

What are they noticing? How would they describe it? What are they feeling? And then when they give those words back, now I can start to shift up the way that I'm providing those instructions. Their language back, what they say, what they don't say, both of those arenas of feedback will play into how I might engage with my next set of instructions, my next set of offerings.

So that's the first piece, again, that I want to summarize, is what we are saying actually landing? Now, as an aside, I've always been quite good at this skill. It's been something I've been curious all of my career and knowing that the language that I offer plays a huge part in the results my clientele get, I'm always looking inadvertently or unconsciously looking for opportunities to improve the way that I am sharing.

And since having my kids, holy smokes, it has been amazing to be able to engage with growing children from the ages, because they're now seven, the ages from zero to seven and how I'm interacting with me. They give me a great metaphorical and non-metaphorical sandbox to really play in. I've seen how my language lands, both the words that I use, but also in the delivery with which I use them.

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It's also fantastic to notice when my bandwidth is a little bit smaller and how my language can then come about or what I need to pay attention to. If I'm feeling a little under the weather, if I'm feeling a little bit tired, if I'm feeling whatever I'm feeling, I can tell that my language can sometimes reflect that with them. And that has been huge in terms of improving my fluency with my engagement with my clientele and what I see and what I don't see or what they show me, what they don't tell me, what they do show me.

All of that plays into me really being able to tune into, is what I am saying landing? It has us improve our presence to improve our capacity to be with our client. Do you see how amazing this can be if you spend some time pondering it? How or is what I am saying landing? Take that time and consider, is what I am saying landing? How is it landing? And then ask and find out.

There have been times with private clients where I have quite literally asked them, I said, did that one land very well? Or what I just said, did that make sense? Or when I am saying what I'm saying, where do you notice it in your body? And the importance of that statement is one where there might be an objective cueing that I am providing, which I will get into next, but how they subjectively experience it might be in a totally different place.

That doesn't mean that the cue or the instruction that was provided was wrong. It just gives a lot more information about how it has landed and how it has absorbed and how their system overall has interpreted it.

So this leads me then into this notion of how you are cueing or specifically what you are saying. And one of the things that I've noticed a lot in the practice of yoga is there are movements that yoga teachers or yoga therapists want their clients to do, but the way that they're instructing them is actually creating a very ineffective result.

So what do I mean by that? So for example, there are a lot of yoga poses that require hip rotation and hip abduction. So legs stepping wide or the leg bone rotating in the hip socket. Lots and lots and lots of yoga poses require

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that to step into, but what's interesting is very little of the cueing actually focuses on the leg bone moving in the pelvis.

Pay attention to that and notice, like just go on to random YouTube channels, listen to what you're saying. I've noticed this for a long, long, long period of time where when we ask people to move their legs wide at the hip sockets, what we actually say most of the time is step your feet wide. And then what is said is turn your feet out or angle your foot out. The focus then is on the foot, it's not actually at the hip.

And the reality is that we can move our ankle and the foot will turn out, but that's not actually what's required when we're moving into say something like warrior two or triangle set up.

So if we're coming from Tadasana as an example, and we want to move in toward warrior two or triangle, a common way that is shared is step the feet wide, turn the foot out. That's the front leg. The reality of the movement is moving the leg bones out at the hip socket, turning your leg bone in your hip.

Now, some people might say, but Susi, that's kind of clunky in terms of a way of saying it. Sure, it might sound clunky when you're used to cueing at the feet. But here's the thing, there is a huge, huge injury rate that's related to poor hip function in the practice of yoga. I mean, in a lot of areas. And the reality in a lot of those areas, and particularly in yoga is that so many of the cues have very little focus on the hip itself. And while it might be clunky, it's actually accurate and draws people's focus of attention to that area.

I remember my husband and I, when we were first dating and we were going to yoga class pretty regularly. And he said to me after a year of doing this, he said, you know, I'm really surprised that my hips are no more flexible than they were when we started. And I said to him, that's because you're not actually working with your hips.

He sort of looked at me, he goes, but my hips are moving. I said, sort of, but not really. There's a lot of compensating that's happening and many of

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the instructions or the cues that are being provided actually are locking your hips down. They're not supporting them in becoming more mobile. And what I offered to him is when you hear this cue and that cue and this cue, let that go. And instead, really focus on how your leg bone is moving in your socket with your pelvis, in these cases, being quiet.

Now back in the day, just as an example, a cue that was really, really, really popular, it still might be today, I'm not sure, but it was tucking your tailbone. Lots of tucking the tailbone, lots of lengthening the tailbone. And what would happen, and for a lot of people in the room, including my husband at the time, well, he's still my husband, but when we were dating at the time, that would lock their pelvis down because they move into a posterior tilt and then would then move their foot instead.

So they were moving their foot and then tucking that tail. And that was in part what was contributing to him not actually gaining more mobility at the hip. When he started to let go of the pelvic tucking and let go of moving the foot, but instead moving the leg bone in the hip socket, two weeks, two weeks and his hip mobility increased tenfold because he was focused on the area that was meant to move.

We see this in many, many, many different ways. We see this in tree pose, we see this in eagle pose, as I mentioned, warrior two, triangle, so many of the positions. And a part of the reason for this is because in our 200 and 500 hour teacher trainings, there is a focus on the final position. This is what the final position is.

And if you look at pictures, especially back in the day like 20 years ago, you would see the final position and you have arrows pointing. This is the energy of where your parts and energy of the pose is going, but nowhere there did it actually describe how you are moving into the pose. And that really is what's distinct here, is we're not trying to just put parts of our body into a position. We're wanting to move into a position and we want to describe the movement into said position.

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And that's really where and how I cue from. I'm not cueing the final pose. I'm cueing the trajectory of that pose, which is why I can go back to the first point of being, is what I am saying landing? And if what I'm seeing is compensatory patterns, then it's clear that what I am saying is not landing on some level. And then I get to take responsibility for, huh, I wonder what I am saying. I'm wondering how the delivery is not having it land. Let me engage with my client and find that out.

And there's a whole artistry and skill to being able to do that that's not disruptive, that's not traumatizing, that's actually building and full of hope and possibility of listening deeply and of lots and lots of love. It leads to so much more of an objective conversation that blends in their subjective experience.

And as we do that, we build the relationship not only with them, but we model a relationship of trust and openness, which is what they then learn in their own bodies. That is the power of great cueing. That is when cueing comes alive.

So stay tuned, I will share more about cueing for different groups of yoga asana, how we can utilize our cues and our instructions to really prevent yoga injuries or yoga related injuries and really up-level the way that these poses are coming alive in our bodies and our clients' bodies to really make yoga come alive in our being. I hope you enjoyed that. Take care, we'll see you next time.

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.