

## Ep. #329 - Coordination Over Contraction – Rethinking Core Retraining: A Client Story



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:

Susi Hatelly

[From Pain to Possibility](#) with Susi Hatelly

## Introduction (00:00.00)

You are listening to From Pain To Possibility with Susi Hatelly. You'll 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 Hatelly.

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Susi: Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad that you're here because today we're exploring what happens when someone is doing everything right, but nothing is changing. It's about the gap between training a muscle and retraining a pattern. It's about the difference between compensation and coordination. It's about the quiet shift that happens when someone is finally seen and not simply corrected. This isn't a story about one person's transverses abdominis, although I will be talking about it. It's really about what happens when our current model of rehabilitation and movement isn't enough and what becomes possible when we can change the lens.

This episode is based off of a story with a long-time client. It doesn't come from a recent session, but rather a follow-up call that I had with her. She had been applying the work that we had done together for some time because she had taken a private series and had taken courses in my on-demand catalog. And all in all, she's made some tremendous gains in many ways. She's really a poster child for moving from pain to possibility, the process of healing and recovery. And she reached out to reflect on what really worked, what actually stuck, and what hasn't and why. She's someone who's deeply embodied, thoughtful, and insightful. She doesn't want to just heal. She wants to train with me so she can share the work with others. and she's right on the edge of being able to do that. But there's still a piece that she's working through in her own body.

Now wanna be clear that that she's still working on something in her own body doesn't mean she's not getting it and not understanding. It's actually because many of the professionals around her are seeing only the part and not the pattern. So this episode reflects on some of what she shared with me on our call. And I wanna make sure to mention here that I have permission to share these pieces with you. So even though I'm not mentioning her name, energetically I'm still sharing her story. So it's important for me to mention that there is permission granted.

She shared a story with me about working with a practitioner who was using ultrasound to assess her deep core. A really common type of practice in deep core training where the practitioner is cued to engage their transverse abdominis, a real classic target in core training. And she followed the cue, she drew her belly in like zipping up her pants. And visually, it looked great. It often does. Her belly moved in and from the outside, it seemed like the cue had worked, but the ultrasound told a different story.

Now, let me just stay here. If you're not familiar with using ultrasound to assess the deep core, This is the exact same technology that people use to view babies and kidneys and all the things. So the ultrasound in this case is likely being used not only to see the transversus but also the surrounding muscles like obliques, rectus abdominis, the diaphragm and the pelvic floor. What was found is that when the ultrasound was there, the transversus abdominis was hardly doing anything. Instead, her obliques and QLs were taking over. They were compensating so well that it looked like she had great core function, and yet under the surface, there wasn't very much synergy, not much load transfer, and very little coordination.

So she asked the practitioner what she should do next. The response? Just keep doing it. It'll eventually click in. There weren't any adjustments provided. No feedback. Just repetition. And then my client said something to me that really stuck and that captures the heart of today's episode. They weren't retraining the pattern. They were rehearsing the compensation pattern. And that's it. That's the line. And that really is the difference that so many clients intuitively feel and so many practitioners unintentionally miss.

So if you're a practitioner listening right now, I want to offer this really gently and as clearly and with so much love as I can. We're not here to train compensation. We're here to retrain clarity. There's a massive difference between activating a muscle and restoring a functional, coordinated, load-bearing relationship between systems. So when we say, you know, just do it again, it will eventually work. We might very well be reinforcing the patterns that got the client stuck in the first place. This client knew she could feel it. She said to me, I'm not looking to engage a muscle per se. I'm looking, Susie, to what you often say. I want the orchestra to play together and that's what's missing.

Like think about our bodies, think about the core or the deeper inner core, I should say, because the core is much broader than the abdomen. But think about transversus, obliques, diaphragm, pelvic floor. And let's throw the rectus abdominis and QL in there as well because Those muscles can get so highly involved as compensation patterns in the working of that deeper core, in the desire to access the transverses. In her case, this one section was overworking and one was silent. So if we think about that as an orchestra, if you've got one section overplaying and another section silent, If the obliques are overworking, the QL is overworking, the transverses is silent, then what sort of music or melody do you have?

She did connect with a body worker, an intuitive person that she connected with, who she loved working with. She was a very hands-on person, and she called this person someone who had

magic hands. And she would leave those sessions feeling so much more ease and much more connected. But what she said was that what was very curious to her, that even though she did leave the session with that state, And even though on the table things were working so much better and connecting so much more effectively between her transversus and QL and obliques, when she stood up, the pattern, her older pattern, the compensatory pattern returned. And she could feel that instantly. The very muscles that had shifted and re-coordinated during hands-on work snapped back into their old roles the second she stood up.

She asked me, know, what sort of cue can you give me to kind of get over this hump so that when I stand up, my old pattern doesn't return? My response was that I don't need to give her more cues. the queue isn't going to be the game changer. What she does need is to be able to shift coordination under load because that's what isn't happening. So the issue again wasn't the queue specifically or the right queue that she needed. Her system didn't yet know how to apply load in a different context. So she had progress in low load positions, but it wasn't translating when demand increased. And this is what a big part of the difference is. And when you start to understand and embody this difference, that's where things can really start to change.

Here's an insight that's related to this. So many clients come to see me after rounds of working with other professionals, correcting parts that don't change the pattern, and they've gained awareness. I'm not knocking those other professionals whatsoever. But the thing is, is that repetition won't resolve compensation per se. Strength alone doesn't restore coordination under load. And that's one reason things keep coming back. It's why things don't stick. Because until the body learns a new way to organize under pressure and under load with real feedback and a real sense of safety, it will default to what it already knows as a well-honed, grooved pattern.

Again, and I want to emphasize this, and I say this a lot through the episode, I'm not trying to lay blame. I simply want to recognize the limits of a part-based framework. If we're only training to isolate and cue and then test and repeat, we might very well be missing what's actually driving the movement. We can miss how someone is solving for safety, what's happening between the muscles, where the breakdown in communication is actually occurring. So if you're a client who's been told everything looks fine, but it still doesn't feel right, you're not broken. And if you're a professional thinking, why isn't this sticking? The answer might not be in more reps or better cues. It might be in learning to see the pattern underneath the part.

Because the client in this story, she's not confused. She's not fragile. She's certainly not resisting. She's simply outgrown a model that reinforces what's already working and she's ready for a model that helps restore what's been missing. And that's where we'll go next. So let's consider what happens when she stands up. In her case, after her body work session, where things softened and tissue let go and space was restored, as she stood up, almost immediately

the old patterns returned. The same oblique QL patterning jumped in the same familiar bracing, reasserting itself. And this is partly because standing isn't neutral. It's a load-bearing state and under load the nervous system, our whole system really, will not defer to what's new. It will default to what it trusts, even if it's a distortion or a compensation.

I liken this to a new pattern being like new legs or like Bambi on ice, trying to find our legs underneath ourselves. When there's a well-grooved compensatory pattern, that well-grooved pattern is what we tend to default to. Because even though it doesn't work necessarily well on one level, on another one, it does. It's what's comfortable. And this is a part so many professionals and even us as clients can miss. And the reality is, is we can't expect a pattern to change just because we introduced a better idea. We have to retrain how the brain and tissues communicate under pressure and under load. It's one of the biggest misunderstandings I see across movement and rehabilitation spaces. This idea of retraining versus repatterning.

Professionals often focus on the training part, cueing it, activating it, isolating it. They assume if you do it enough times, it will eventually wake up. But here's the deeper truth. part is part of the problem. And patterns don't shift through repetition. They shift through repatterning, which means meeting the body where it actually is, respecting what it's doing to stay safe and layering in new options under just enough challenge. And that is the key. It's not about showing the nervous system a new movement and hoping it's stick. It's about initiating a new communication strategy. between brain and tissue. That's what motor control is, and that's what coordination actually means. It's not just that a muscle fires, it's that it fires in context, in relationship with everything else at the right time, in the right direction, with the right amount of force and under the right conditions that doesn't come from queuing harder or doing it again. It comes from rebuilding a clean, responsive feedback loop. The brain sends a signal, the tissue responds. The brain sends a response, it adjusts, the tissue adapts. Again, that's motor control. That's what gets distorted when compensation takes over. And that's why when someone's nervous system has been surviving through bracing, the communication loop can get fuzzy. Repetition without recalibration rehearses this old misfire.

So when we say retrain the pattern, What we are actually saying is restoring clarity to the conversation between brain and tissue. If you're a practitioner, you might already be thinking of a client like this, someone who moves well in, air quotes so to speak, but really doesn't feel well. Things look functional, but lack coordination. They do everything right, but still there's an integration of change that isn't happening. And more so, their pain or ache or strain is not going away. This isn't a motivational problem. It's not even a strength problem. It's a mapping problem. And unless we update the internal map, unless we help the nervous system communicate with more clarity, the body will fall back on the problem.

So let's consider load as feedback and not force by treating load as feedback, not as force. By creating just enough challenge to initiate clearly without tipping the system into overwhelm. In

my work, what that might look like is doing small joint specific movement and then building upon singular joint movement and adding complexity with more joint movement. Perhaps getting one joint, let's say the shoulders, getting that involved. And then as the shoulders start to move better, then integrating that in with the hips, maybe doing one thing on one side of the body, moving one leg in one way, and then on the other side of the body, moving the leg in another way. So we're starting to begin with simple, and then we add more and more complexity, but consistently through the exercises, because it's not just about exercises, it's noticing and helping a client become aware of how the parts of the body are connecting.

So we're working through exercises, but it's not about the exercises. It's about enabling the client to be aware of how their parts are connecting, how we're doing the exercises, how we're doing the movement. That's what's important. It's not about getting into a shape. It's about coordination, the how of how things are working, how much bracing we're using as we load, understanding what that is, what it feels like. noticing that gives a nervous system something to feel, something to organize around. So all in all, it isn't to activate the transversus. Really the goal is to restore a conversation between the transversus, between the pelvis, the ribs and the legs, the breath, the pelvic floor, thoracic spine, and truly the whole system. That is real core. And that's the how of how we're doing it. And it's where some professionals hesitate to slow down.

And by hesitating to slow down, what I mean is how I go from say singular joint movement and then add more joints or maybe do one thing on one side of the body and add something different on the other side. So like warrior two, for example, you take one leg out and you're bending it through the hip and the knee on one side and the other leg is into extension. While some people might hesitate to do something like that in that sort of way, they consider it slowing down, not going fast enough, fearing it's a step backward. But the idea here is it's refinement, not regression. And it's in refinement that we, how we build real capacity. When a client stands up and the old pattern returns, it's not failure, it's feedback. It's the body saying, I don't yet trust this new strategy under load. It's not a reason to push harder, it's a reason to listen more closely.

If you're a professional, you already know this. You've seen clients who relax beautifully in restorative poses but stiff in the moment they stand, who nail the cue on the mat but can't carry it into the stairs or walking, who follow all instructions and still don't feel right. It's not that they need more cues, it's that they need more accurate feedback loop. And if you're a client and you've been doing the work and it still feels like something's off, know this, you're not weak. you're not slow and you're not too complex. You've got patterns and your system is asking for a repatterning with clarity, care and precision. And that's how standing up stops being the moment that everything falls apart and becomes a moment when everything starts working together.

So you've heard the difference here between repetition and repatterning, between strengthening apart and restoring communication between the whole. And I wanna take this deeper into the real heart of the matter. Because underneath all of this mechanics and brain-body connection is a very human experience of being misunderstood. If you've ever been on the receiving end of a well-meaning practitioner who has told you just to keep doing it will eventually stick, the scans are clear, you're fine. It's probably just weakness. Then you know the moment of that internal jolt when your body says, no, something isn't right. And you leave the session perhaps confused, agitated, annoyed, or something similar. Now, it's not because they were rude. It's because they didn't actually see you. And that's where so many clients begin to shut down, dissociate, or over-effort. Not because they've given up, but because they've been unintentionally trained to doubt their own experience. And that kind of misunderstanding doesn't just stall healing, it shapes identity. Clients begin to internalize failure that isn't theirs. They wonder if they're too sensitive, too slow, too complicated. And sometimes they give up on just not the healing process, but even being helped.

In this follow-up call, my client was calm, reflective, and she had language for what was happening. She had said, they're not retraining the pattern, they're just rehearsing the compensation. She wasn't angry, she wasn't blaming. She was seeing it clearly, and this is what is so powerful. She had already done deep nervous system work. She had already softened. She had already explored intuitive therapies and functional sequencing. The reason she came back to me was because I could name what was happening in a way that matched her own internal sense. And that's what it means to be truly seen. Not fixed, not overridden, and not managed, but rather met, understood, accompanied. And that's what creates a safe enough space for new strategies to emerge because somebody finally mirrored back the full reality of what was happening. Not just what was tight or weak or misaligned. but what made sense in the context of the whole.

If you're a movement professional, this is your moment of opportunity. Because our job isn't just to guide movement, it's to read what the system is saying and to respond with precision, not projection. That means we don't just ask what muscle is weak, we ask what coordination is missing, what strategy is overworking. What load can the system actually handle? And where is the feedback loop breaking down? When we stop treating the body like a machine and start looking at it like an ecosystem, adaptable, communicative, and full of intelligence, that's where clinical results truly deepen, and that's where trust builds. Do you see that clinical results deepen has a relationship to trust building. And that's where clients will be able to feel heard and they will also stay because they feel understood in motion. When you learn to see it in this way, you stop working against a body and start working with its logic. You become a pattern interpreter, a body detective, not just a position corrector. And that's the work that creates transformation, not just momentary change.

I said this earlier and I'll say it again here because it matters so much. You're not too complex and neither is your client. And you're not too patterned for a part-based approach. When you've been told that everything looks fine, but it doesn't feel fine, it's not because you're broken. It's

because the framework used to assess you is too narrow. Your systems might be coordinating brilliantly, just not functionally. You might be solving for stability at the cost of freedom. And the solution isn't pushing harder. It's pausing longer, refining deeper, and allowing your system the time to support it needs to build a new strategy. Sometimes the most healing moment isn't when the pain stops. It's when someone finally sees what's been there. When someone says, That makes sense. I see what your system is doing. And that's when the shame dissolves, when the confusion starts to lift, when capacity starts to grow, because it's no longer being forced through distortion.

And that's what happened on this call with my client. She didn't want new strategies per se. She wanted to understand what had already worked and build upon it. She wanted to teach this work in her own world. And she also knows there's still a piece that she's working through in her own body. It's not a flaw and it's not resistance. It's simply the next step in repatterning how she relates to herself under load.

So what does this mean for all of us? If you're a client, you're not asking for magic, you're asking for meaning. And if you're a professional, your ability to see patterns, to track what's really happening between breath, muscle, and nervous system, that's what sets you apart. That pattern seeking and seeing ability. You don't have to force function. You can build it one quiet connection at a time. And when you do, your clients won't just feel better, they'll feel seen. And that's what changes everything.

So as I wrap this up, here is what I want to leave you with. If you're a client or a student who's been doing the work and it still doesn't feel right, you're not broken, you're not stuck, and you're not making it up. You may simply be patterned in a way that no one has fully yet seen. Your body might be communicating through compensation. Your system might be coordinating brilliantly, just not functionally. Your nervous system might be doing its absolute best while still needing support to find a new way. The path forward isn't pushing through, it's listening more deeply and then responding with precision, compassion and clarity.

And if you're a professional and you've been sensing that there's more to this work than strengthening a part or cueing a posture, you're right. Your clients don't need fancier corrections, they need you to see them in motion and to recognize not just what's happening, but why. They need you to see the difference between coordination and contraction, safety and strategy, a clean movement and a rehearsed compensation. And they need you to hold space for a different kind of progress. One built on communication, not compliance. And that's how results deepen. That's how client confidence grows. That's how you grow from technician to translator. from corrector to conductor to movement detective.

Whether you're just starting out or you've been working with the body for decades, I hope this episode reminds you that it isn't just about the muscle, it's about the message and what the body is asking for underneath the effort. Thanks for listening. Thank you for doing the work and being interested in this kind of work. The kind that honors complexity, the kind that builds trust,



the kind that leaves room for nervous system intelligence, motor control, biomechanics, and human experience all in one breath. And if you're ready to go deeper into this kind of work, to learn how to see patterns, refine and guide people out of compensations and into true clarity, then please consider the therapeutic yoga intensive that I'm running from October 25th to October 30th, 2025. I would love for you to join me, where I can show you exactly how I do this and how you can do it too. It's the foundational training of really supporting people in reducing and eradicating physical pain. To learn more, please visit [functionalsynergy.com/intensive](https://functionalsynergy.com/intensive). Until next time, keep listening and keep seeing, keep breathing. Take care.

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Hey, did you love this episode? If you're ready to dig in deeper and explore more holistically with me, come and check out the Therapeutic Yoga Intensive happening this October, October 25th to the 30th. You can learn more over at [functionalsynergy.com/intensive](https://functionalsynergy.com/intensive)