

Ep. #374 - Becoming a Movement Detective 1/7: Choreography, Corrective Exercise, and Being a Movement Detective



Full Episode Transcript

With your host:

Susi Hately

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

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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Welcome and welcome back. I'm so glad you're here, because I'm embarking on a new miniseries over the next seven weeks on what it means to be a movement detective. And it's this notion of being a movement detective which is what I am naming as the core of what contributes to my success as a yoga therapist, why I am very effective at helping people to reduce and eliminate physical pain, whether that's in one-on-one sessions, through my on-demand courses, or inside of my live online group programs.

It's also why my trainees and grads who truly follow and apply the principles I teach often become just as effective at helping people too. The core of this is not only what I know from a biomechanical and a kinesiological lens. I do have a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology that I have applied specifically to helping people to reduce and eliminate pain, and it's not just about integrating that with yoga, although that is a major piece of it.

It's how I do what I do. And that's what this series is about, about being and becoming a movement detective and what that means for helping people to reduce and eliminate pain. This is also a lead-in to my newest program that begins July the 6th called Foundations for Becoming a Movement Detective, and you can learn all about that program over at functional.synergy.com/detective.

So let's dig in. In today's episode, I wanna begin by exploring the distinction between choreography, corrective exercise, and being a movement detective, because these are actually very different modes of helping people. Sometimes they interweave, but other times they don't. And I think one of the reasons so many practitioners do get confused, stuck, or overwhelmed or uncertain in therapeutic work is because of the model of understanding that they're utilizing.

That model is a gap. It's missing a really key piece to supporting the process of recovery, of healing, and essentially understanding the body, pain, movement, and what it takes to truly recover. So today, I want to unpack that a little bit. A big reason yoga teachers and other health professionals come and train with me, especially after taking one of my lower cost programs like Power of the Pits, is because they experience meaningful changes in their bodies that they can feel somatically, but intellectually they can't fully explain.

So as an example, in the Power of the Pits, many people notice their wrist changing, or their SI joint experience changing, or the back pain going down, their breathing shifting, and in some cases, the pain in their knee changing. And on the surface, it just doesn't seem to make sense

to them. Part of this gap comes from the way many of us have been trained to think about the body, that many systems organize the body in a very direct binary way.

If X hurts, do Y. Tight hip flexors, stretch them. Weak glutes, strengthen them. Shoulder pain, stabilize the scapula. Knee pain, fix the knee. And while those approaches absolutely help for some people, they can also unintentionally train us to think about isolated parts instead of relationships and patterns. Bodies though are not actually operating as isolated pieces.

They are adaptive systems. So when we look at choreographed-based systems, systems that really focus in on peak poses and perfect transitions and how we're moving from the start of a class to the end of a class, the emphasis is often on achieving a shape.

Sometimes getting deeper into the pose is what's key, or how long you can hold a posture, make a movement look a certain way. And the reality is, is that bodies and the brains that are associated with those bodies are incredibly adaptable. People can often achieve a shape while gripping, bracing, holding their breath, compressing joints, and even overriding discomfort. So there's a limit to choreographed-based systems.

Corrective exercise moved this conversation forward because it began to recognize that compensation and dysfunction do exist.

With corrective exercise models, questions started to come up like what is weak and what is tight, what needs stabilizing and what needs releasing? And while those approaches also help, many corrective systems still tend to focus or orient around where is the problem and how do we fix it.

But the trouble with this is, is that many people stay stuck because where the pain is is not actually where the primary pattern is coming from. I like to say that pain is not where the problem is, but it certainly is a sign that a limitation or a dysfunction is present. And so often that limitation or dysfunction is under the level of awareness for someone.

I remember working at the Toronto Yoga Conference, and someone came to my downward dog workshop, and the sole reason she had registered for the entire conference programming was she wanted to fix her dog.

And when she went into dog, she had a really interesting pattern of dropping through one shoulder. She intellectually knew she was doing that. She had so many people tell her that she was doing it, but no matter what cuing that they gave her, she could never feel it. So intellectually, sure, she got it, but somatically, she did not have a clue.

She couldn't even sense it. So it's a great example of where the pain is or where the issue is is often not the problem. And what occurred as we went through the two-hour workshop is we did movements that had nothing to do, or apparently nothing to do, with downward facing dog, but rather just how to connect to the shoulders and the ribs and the pelvis.

And then all of a sudden, completely to our, all of our astonishment, she started to be able to feel the shoulder, and she was able to shift it. Not by shifting the shoulder though, because the shoulder was responding to another pattern in the body, one that she also wasn't aware of. But when she was, everything started to click.

So when we think about power of the pits and the stories of people's wrists or SI joints, breath, back, or knee changes, the key here is that clearly the body is operating through relationships and patterns and not isolated parts. And this is where things can get really, really interesting.

Pain appears, and if someone wants to get rid of the pain, they do the obvious corrective thing. And they might get some relief, but oftentimes it doesn't fully resolve. So then they try more techniques. But because they're not actually solving the thing that is needing to be solved, the pain keeps returning, shifting, or becoming more confusing.

It's not uncommon for someone to then say, "Well, maybe it's just stress." Or a professional, I've heard this many times, a professional saying, "Well, it is maybe psychosomatic," or, "Perhaps it's all in your head," or, "Maybe it's the brain's interpretation of pain."

And to be clear, I'm not knocking pain science or the people who are talking about pain science. Not at all. Pain is absolutely influenced by the nervous system, stress, emotion, fear, context, and previous experiences, a person's perception, sensitivity, and meaning.

The issue that I'm trying to really bring across here is that people can sometimes prematurely abandon movement pattern relationships, neuromuscular motor control, and coordinating relationships because they're using too narrow of a model of mechanics.

If we believe the body works in a simple linear way—tight thing, so stretch it; weak thing, so strengthen it; painful thing, fix it—and then when those approaches don't work, people can start jumping to a conclusion that nothing mechanical is happening because the mechanical things I'm doing are not working. So maybe it is just in my head.

But often the issue is operating through relationships and adaptive patterns that are more complex than a simple one-on-one correction model.

And it's a really important clarification, and it's where becoming a movement detective really matters. Instead of going after isolated symptoms or trying to find an overall problem area or abandoning the body entirely, someone becoming a movement detective learns how to observe compensations,

breathing strategies,

bracing patterns,

the way someone is coordinating their movement from the start to the finish,

the amount of effort that's being used,

how symptoms escalate,

and how relief occurs.

The key piece that I've said already on this episode and that I say over and over and over again is that where the pain isn't the problem. Because the pain is real, the nervous system involvement is real, the emotional experience is real, but the painful area is often not the primary driver of the pattern, but rather the output of the pattern.

And when people get that nuance, they start to shift out of binary thinking and into something that actually makes more sense, because they begin to realize that the body was never random. And that may be the issue, is that nobody had ever helped them understand the relationships and patterns underneath that they were experiencing.

And that's really what becoming a movement detective is all about. It's learning how to recognize patterns instead of going after isolated symptoms. It's being curious about what's contributing or correlated to those symptoms.

You can really see clearly in the way poses are often taught. In many choreographed-based systems, the emphasis is on the final shape. Can the person get into the pose? Does it look aligned? Does it look correct? And then if not, well, here's the modification. But the modification very, very, very, very rarely has anything to do about improving the function.

It's more about how to keep the class moving.

What's missed in that process is any compensation that happened before someone even arrived in the final position. So even when a teacher looks at the final positions and says like, "Oh gosh, there's something off here," and if they can actually see it and then try to correct it, like squaring the pelvis or lifting the chest or pulling the shoulders back, they often quite accidentally layer compensation on top of compensation.

When you're a movement detective, it's not just about where someone ends up. It's paying attention to how someone got there. The story isn't from A to B. The transition from, say, going from Tadasana into Warrior II or into Tree and then Warrior I.

As an example, I was working with a private client recently, and she was describing her years of yoga practice. She said she had done a certain style years ago, but eventually moved away from it because as she put it, they kept telling her that, "Hey, this is the form, this is the pose. Get into it any way that you can."

And she started to describe the cueing she had received over the years. Everyone just tells me to lengthen, to move the shoulders back. But each time she did it, she just kept feeling more and more and more tension.

And that's really an important distinction, because what they were cueing was the result that they were wanting.

They were resulting, "Okay, let's lengthen. Just move the shoulders back." But when they were lifting and pulling the shoulders back, she was actually creating more tension and strain in her body. Nobody was paying attention to how she was actually accomplishing those results.

When I started to work with her, I wasn't at all interested in getting her deeper into a pose or even into a pose period. I was more interested in watching what happened as she moved.

As her arms would move overhead, for example, I could see her ribs beginning to brace and flare, her jaw tighten, her eyes harden.

I could see the grip and the effort.

But here's the thing, you don't need any of that to bring the arms over the head.

So then I asked her to simply move in the range where that wasn't happening. The movement wasn't very big, but it kinda makes sense because when I'm working with people who have pain, their actual movement is actually a lot smaller than their compensation movement.

And as we improve that movement pattern, her range got bigger in a matter of a few repetitions, and she felt better.

Her words to me were, "It's not like the range of motion is perfect, but it just feels so much easier this way."

And then here's what's fun. After just doing a few simple movements up at her shoulder girdle, when she stood up, she said, "Wow, you know, I can feel my feet more." She realized that she was more grounded in her feet because of her shoulder work.

And of course, like almost every other client, she laughed because we hadn't done anything directly with her feet.

We also had not talked about posture, nor standing taller or lengthening anything, and yet because of the way that I taught her about movement, how her parts were now oriented changed. Her posture shifted.

Like many of my clients, this one laughed a lot because it seemed so absurd that her posture was changing, her feet were feeling better, and she felt longer and taller by a few movements at her shoulder girdle.

And none of these movements had to do with retraction, protraction, pulling the shoulder back, dropping the shoulder blades down to her hips. It was nothing like that at all.

But we did help shift some tension. We did shift the way that her brain and her body were coordinating. We did help her tune in and not just become aware, but apply that awareness so she got more clear, more connected, and had better feedback between her brain and her body.

And that was the start.

That relief lasted for days. So then when she checked in with me next, we could take what she had learned about that relief and bring it into the next phase, the next step.

And then as the weeks progressed, so did she. Not because we were creating new choreographical types of sequences or providing corrective exercises to fix a problem. We were helping her move better.

Simply move better. Building on the gains she already had. There was nothing to fix. There was simply better movement to occur.

And to me, that is a really fundamental distinction. By being a movement detective, you become curious and exploratory. You're able to tune in and act upon that awareness based off of what the body's signals are giving you.

Listening, acting, not trying to coerce or make the body behave, but rather to listen to what's already there.

The next episode is going to dig into why forcing doesn't facilitate sustainable change. It builds upon this idea that so much of what we do in rehabilitative circles is try to coerce our body into doing something, and yet coercion doesn't tend to work really well for sustainability or for even building strength.

So if this resonates and is interesting to you, I look forward to connecting with you next week.

And in the meantime, if you wanna learn more about becoming a movement detective as a way of truly helping someone to reduce and eliminate pain, of enabling yourself to move from yoga teacher to therapeutic yoga instructor, to really effective yoga therapist, come and check it out. **functionalsynergy.com/detective**.

See you next time.

Hey there. Are you really interested in improving your skill, getting results therapeutically with your yoga students? They've got pain, and you wanna improve your ability to help them.

Check out my latest program, **functionalsynergy.com/detective**. It's all about helping you become your own Sherlock Holmes, supporting your clients in reducing and eliminating pain.

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