



Energy Vampires

Finding Ways to Protect Yourself and Your Energy

By Karrie Osborn

Good News for the Client

When combatting the forces that want to drain you and bring you down, taking care of the body is a good tool for finding balance. And massage is at the top of the list. Here's what author Judith Orloff, M.D., says in her book *Positive Energy: Ten Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress, and Fear Into Vibrance, Strength, and Love*:

"Regular massage is most effective. A weekly session is ideal, but monthly ones can still improve your energy. Designate this as sacred time, an appointment not to be canceled except for emergency. I prefer a masseuse to come to my home in the evening. Then I don't have to go out, and I can savor the energy. Afterward, I take a bath, go to sleep, then drift into dreams, cocooned in this stress-free state. In contrast, some young mothers I treat look forward to escaping to a salon for an appointment while their mate or babysitter watches the kids. Never forget: Putting yourself first for a few hours is good mothering. The better shape moms are in, the better shape kids will be in too. Plus, children learn to model

Into the shadows of a treatment room, where hushed tones die quickly in this unusually quiet sanctuary, an unsuspecting therapist walks in to meet her client. Suddenly, without warning or provocation, she is attacked from behind ... by an "energy vampire."

OK, the season is having fun with us. This scene is truly not macabre (it could be any therapy room), and the environment hardly life-threatening (it's just a needy client who is clueless she's "attacked" her therapist), but energy vampires do exist, and they do wreak havoc in the world of massage and bodywork.

Longtime Foe

Energy vampire" is a term that's been used in energy and bodywork circles for some time. Ask most any therapist about them and you'll get a knowing, albeit wincing, grin.

The debris left in the wake of one of these people is extensive, depending on the degree of their attack. Exhaustion, physical pain, sadness, and an overall sensation of being drained energetically, emotionally, and physically are just some of the results of dealing with an energy vampire.

Healthcare workers, including everyone from doctors to massage therapists to home care aides, seem especially prone to the vampire's clutches because they maintain such close contact with people and offer care in a personal way others don't. Being in a compassionate role often opens the door to a vampire's tendencies. As the experts will tell you, that's one of the biggest lessons a therapist must learn — not to let compassion supercede self-preservation.

Those who've seen the vampire at work explain that when a therapist confuses compassion for "taking on the pain," they are easy pickings. The desire to do good work and help ease the discomfort of others can often win out over self-care. Self-awareness, healthy professionalism, and sound boundary-setting

...and, ultimately, to those such enlightened self-care and will later give it to themselves.

"Along with massage, I'm also a proponent of pampering yourself with a range of beauty services: manicures, pedicures, body wraps, aromatherapy, mud baths. They all feel divine [and] feed your body and energy field. When you approach beauty services as a form of healing, not narcissism, the energy gain for you is huge."



"Energy vampire" is a term that's been used in energy and bodywork circles for some time. Ask most any therapist about them and you'll get a knowing, albeit wincing, grin.



can keep the threat at bay and keep the energy vampires in your life from sinking their fangs into your personal and professional soul.



Count Dracula They're Not

Energy vampires are not picky about from whom they'll feed: Friends will do it to friends, co-workers to co-workers, brothers to sisters, mothers to daughters, and of course, clients to therapists. Over the years, the energy vampire concept has made a name for itself and even come so far as to have a chapter written about it in Judith Orloff's new book, *Positive Energy: 10 Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress, and Fear Into Vibrance, Strength, and Love*.

Trained as a medical doctor, Orloff makes it clear in her book that these vampires exist: "I, a physician board-certified by the American College of Psychiatry and Neurology, want to state formally that energy vampires roam the world sapping our exuberance, an epidemic that medical texts don't address. In my practice and workshops, I've seen their fang marks and the carnage they've strewn."

She explains that while some vampires enjoy the bloodlust, others don't always know what damage they're doing. (See a description of the various types of energy vampires, their traits, and how to defend against them on page 66.)

Over the years, Orloff says she's discovered that many energy vampires are victims themselves of early childhood traumas, such as abuse, illness, or neglectful parents. An energetic leak occurs with this kind of trauma "that impels vampires to feed on the life force of others to compensate," she says.



How can you tell if you've just encountered an energy vampire? "The tip-off is that even after a brief contact you leave feeling worse, but he or she seems more alive." Orloff says after breaking contact with them, you might be compelled to seek the comfort of sleep or food.




Reiki master and massage therapist Cindy Stone says encountering an energy vampire is like being flattened by a bus. "There are some people who make you feel very happy, but others, where you just go OMan, whew, I feel like the life has been sucked out of me."


This Colorado therapist reiterates the fact that most energy vampires don't know the effect they have on others. "They don't have any intent of sucking your energy, but it's like a moth to a flame."

Spa owner Vivian Maxwell-Martin says most of the energy vampires who visit her business are filled with impending doom and drama. "They are very loud people who are always late, constantly moving appointments around, and creating havoc in your parking lot by taking up three spaces. That's the kind of energy they have."




She describes the energy vampire as one who wants to be in command and tries to do so by taking over when they come in the spa. "They'll come in late and then want you to run over and compromise other clientele," Maxwell-Martin says. "When they walk in, they're already angry about something else. And when they get on the table, they'll tell you exactly what you need to be doing." 

Staying in the Game

While everyone is susceptible to the vampire's clutches, there are certain times when you are more at risk. Orloff says to be careful of these things that open you up to vulnerability: 

- Not enough sleep
- Poor diet
- Lack of exercise
- No spiritual replenishment
- Excessive work
- Emotional stress
- Illness
- Substance abuse
- Intuitive empathy on overdrive




Maxwell-Martin says getting drained by a vampire happens to everybody. "Sometimes new therapists get really zapped. I've had it sneak up on me." Her warning to other therapists lobbies for self-care: "If you're doing a lot of bodywork, you get fatigued on all levels, and that is when stuff like this happens. It's important to receive bodywork, try and stay clear, have a healthy state of mind, and practice good eating habits." 

She says it's imperative that therapists keep their aura healthy and closed off. "If you ever let your guard down with these people, they feel that's an open invitation to penetrate and go after that hole you just made for them."

Stone reiterates the importance of knowing when you've done too much. "That's when you're most at-risk."

Garlic Not Necessary

So you've already identified the energy vampires in your business life, now what? "Don't panic," Orloff says. "Before a vampire comes in for an appointment, spend at least a few minutes in meditation to center your energy. Take a few deep breaths, center your awareness in your body, and focus on something very loving — perhaps a flower, a photo of your child, the beautiful night sky." 

Orloff says let the positive energy of those meditative thoughts fill you and try not to work yourself up with negativity and fear before the client comes. "While working on your client, keep breathing out the negative energy you feel. If they say something negative to you, try to stay neutral, and do not react negatively in return."

Strength is important when touching an energy vampire. "It's not about protection," says Stone, who professionally advises





others about reclaiming their energy through strong physical self-awareness and boundary-setting. "It's about being a strong person and having boundaries. Your protection comes from within yourself. If you're strong and clear, you're already protected."

One tool she uses when working with clients is creating a visualization of light in which she forms an egg of energy around her body. "You imagine you are very protected and safe." Then ask whatever your energy source is (divine light, a higher power, etc.), to let it rain down on you with the blue color found in a flame.



"The rule is to put the rubber bands above the elbow and say that the client's energy can't go past that point. It's very effective."

— Vivian Maxwell-Martin, spa owner

If you're working with a very "thirsty" vampire, Stone says to block off the energy centers in your own body. Crossing your legs and not looking her directly in both eyes (just look into one eye or the other) are two ways of shielding from this client.

One "absolute" thing Stone does with every client, she says, is to mentally disconnect from that person when the work is done. With her arms she makes a scissor motion in front of her when the session ends to break that connection. "Their energy is theirs and mine is mine," she says.



Maxwell-Martin has her own routines to protect herself and her staff at First Feather Day Spa in Conifer, Colo. "I keep a grid of crystals in my room and in the spa. That grid helps us be conscientious and facilitates the grounding of the client and the therapist." She says stones can also help calm the vampiric client. Have her hold some grounding stones (any of the heavier stones) during the therapy, such as tektites, fluorites, or meteorites. The stone will help bring the client down a step while offering protection to the therapist as well.




"Oils are also really good," Maxwell-Martin says. "I put white angelica on my shoulders, my crown chakra, and my aura, and I'll offer it to the client as well." She says if the client is really agitated, lavender works wonders.


Before seeing each client, Maxwell-Martin goes through a ritual to help her prepare her energy. "Before I go in the room, I switch the sign over to 'Occupied.' I clear myself and put my protective barrier up. I can do that with reiki, or I can do it with color of light."


She also has enlisted the unlikely help of rubber bands for herself and staff to remind them of boundaries. "The rule," she says, "is to put the rubber bands above the elbow and say that the client's energy can't go past that point. It's very effective." She says several schools incorporate the rubber band practice when teaching how to maintain boundaries.

"Also, when I look at the next day's schedule, and I see who I have, I'll make a mental note to be open or be prepared for what their needs might be," Maxwell-Martin says. "In my mind I create enough energy for what they'll all need." She says those are small tools to combat the energy vampire, "but they can be


very profound."

Orloff, who is both a physician and medical intuitive, says she's had lots of experience with the energy vampire phenomena. "I'm an intuitive empath who tends to be an energy sponge and absorbs negative vibes unless I take precautions," she says. Like Stone, Orloff uses a visualization to stop the draining effect: "Imagine yourself enveloped by a cocoon of white light. Picture it as a shield forming a sturdy barrier around every inch of you. It protects you from absorbing the negative energy of others, but allows positive energy in." 


In addition to the cocoon visualization, Orloff also recommends drinking plenty of water to cleanse your system afterward, and practicing a few minutes of meditation before and after you work on a client. 

She says staying in the here and now helps therapists remain centered and focused so they're not as prone to absorb a vampire's energy. "The key to not letting this negative energy lodge itself in you is to keep breathing, connect with a spiritual power larger than yourself, and let that divine energy wash through you. Doing so is your greatest protection from negativity." 

After the client leaves, Orloff says clear the "negative vibes" in the room by burning sage, an ancient purifier. "Or, jump into a hot tub or a shower and let the water wash the negative energetic residue off of you."

Both Stone and Maxwell-Martin concur that water is an incredible cleansing medium. While a bath of epsom salts is good, Maxwell-Martin says being near or in moving water is even better. "Moving water incorporates a sense of peace and calm and draws that negative energy away." If being near a creek or stream isn't possible, even just washing your hands after the client leaves can help. 

Another ritual is something Stone calls the coffee filter method. You mentally create the filter shape around you. Then fill the actual filter with flames and let it burn away anything you don't want to be there. She has also incorporated rattling (in Native American tradition), drumming, and clapping hands to dispel negative energies. She says a good, loud clap can get things moving.

The psychic debris left by clients is something not to be forgotten or negated, Stone advises. "When we work, we clear people emotionally, spiritually, energetically. There's a lot involved with that. People think they're just getting a massage, but they're wrong." 

Healing the "Elviras" of the World

If you're lucky enough to be able to recognize the vampires in your life, the survival instinct would seem to forbid you from working with them.

However, Maxwell-Martin says that would be a great disservice to yourself, your profession, and the people you serve. "You would really be limiting yourself if you decided not to work on anyone who came across as needy." Plus, she says, every therapist needs to experience the energy vampire at least once. It's a good lesson to remind ourselves of boundaries and professionalism, she says.



"There's no way to avoid them," Stone says of energy vampires. "These people come to you for a reason. It's your responsibility as a healer to help them." Eventually, the energy vampire will get better and stronger and will no longer need your energy.

In the meantime, Stone says, "Be really mindful of your client and of yourself. Take an inventory of yourself after each client and at the end of the day." If you see a problem, then maybe your boundaries are off a little, or you're giving too much of yourself. "If you're out of control, you're no good to anyone else."

Orloff says there is a lot of good you can do for these energy zappers, once you've found a way to protect yourself first.

"Massage therapists are my heroes," Orloff says. "They are on the front lines helping people heal on the deepest body levels. The more you help people balance their energies, the less they will have vampire tendencies. As a psychiatrist and medical intuitive, I know how vulnerable we can be working with others. I treasure my vulnerability but also know that it is important to center and protect my energy, especially around people who can drain it." The key, she says, is finding balance.



"You need to be a strong person," Stone says. "Don't look at the energy vampire as the enemy. To shun them is to deny them what they really need."

Maxwell-Martin brings it back to self-care. To give this work your utmost, she says, you have to be on top of your game. "You have to be healthy. If you are healthy in mind, body, and spirit, you'll be able to do this work for a long time. If you get zapped all the time, you won't last long."



Trust in yourself, prepare yourself, honor yourself, educate yourself — then you'll be ready to deal with the energy vampires of the world and heal them, too.

Resources

Judith Orloff, author of *Positive Energy: Ten Extraordinary Prescriptions for Transforming Fatigue, Stress, and Fear Into Vibrance, Strength, and Love* (Harmony Books, 2004), will be offering a four-day intuitive healing course for healthcare professionals, Jan. 13-16, 2005, in Los Angeles, Calif. More information can be found at her website, www.drjudithorloff.com, under "lecture schedule."

Cindy Stone, reiki master and massage therapist, has advised bodyworkers for years on the subject of energy, balance, and boundaries. She can be reached at dan-tien@comcast.net.

Types of Energy Vampires and How to Combat Them



Judith Orloff, M.D., has defined the various types of energy vampires and how to defend yourself against them. The following is a summary of this categorization:

- **Sob Sister** — Always whining, loves a captive audience, sees self as a victim, fails to see positive side of things.
Defense — Limit the time you spend discussing the sob sister's (or sob brother's) problems; find ways to redirect the conversation and continue to push for positive solutions.
- **Blamer** — Tries to make you feel guilty for not getting things just right, resorts to verbal abuse, overtly angry.
Defense — Build your own energy shield by imagining yourself in a cocoon of white light that keeps you from being harmed. It allows positive energy in, but keeps negative energy out.
- **Drama Queen** — Life is always extreme and filled with crisis, prone to exaggerate.
Defense — Take a deep breath to center yourself. Keep concentrating on your breath and own the moment, thereby taking the power away from the drama queen.
- **Constant Talker or Jokester** — Demands center stage, only concerned with self, addicted to own voice, won't respond to nonverbal cues.
Defense — "They grind our energy down like a relentlessly, yippy Chihuahua who badly needs a walk," says Orloff. Make your needs audible, while still being caring and neutral in tone. Inhale deeply and slowly while feeling feet planted solidly in the ground. Begin your dialogue.
- **Fixer-Upper** — Two types. One sees you as her personal therapist who needs to solve her problems; she is needy and ready to hand over her power to the one who will save her. The other is one you perceive needs fixing. "This vampire is so seductive because he doesn't put up enough of a fight to dissuade you from trying to fix him, yet he's not interested in change."
Defense — As Orloff says, "It takes two to play the fixer-fixee game." To break the codependence, Orloff advises the realization of these things: Others must take responsibility for their own lives. It's not your business to try and fix someone. As a fixer, you'll always end up with your energy drained. And a mutually loving relationship can't grow unless both people are working on it.
- **Outwardly Nice Socializer** — Orloff warns that you might meet these types at parties and celebrations, and while seemingly nice, they learn to grab subtle energy from anyone's field who overlaps with their own.
Defense — Give yourself permission to walk away.
- **Go-for-the-Jugular Fiend** — This person goes directly for the throat and is driven by envy, competition, or severe

insecurity, Orloff says. "The energetic fallout from this vampire is nuclear."

Defense — Break eye contact, use your breath to retrieve your life force (like turning on a vacuum to suction back all that this vampire has taken, Orloff explains), and exhale negativity out the back of your lower spine.

- **Crowds that Drain** — We've all experienced these and dread them especially during the holidays. Crowds can be uplifting as well, but read them carefully.

Defense — Sit somewhere out of the stream of people and take a quiet moment, Orloff says. Take a few deep breaths, close your eyes, and visualize yourself somewhere calm and peaceful. "Immerse yourself in the scene: scents, sounds, textures" before coming back to the present.

- **Unintentional Sappers** — These are usually the people in our lives we love unconditionally. They have no idea they are adding to our energetic drain, but they can often zap us the hardest.

Defense — Orloff says not to be afraid of implementing shielding strategies so close to home. "Securing your vital force is the opposite of selfish; it will increase your stamina and capacity to love." Define and honor your personal space: Negotiate with your family, take special care of yourself when around others in need, and take time out for yourself.

Share your thoughts! Click [here](#) to send a letter to the editor and let us know what you think. Your letter may be used in an upcoming issue of Massage & Bodywork magazine.

Please close window after reading.