

**Alexander Technique Success Stories:  
How does the Alexander process work?  
Mike Klodginski**

*Clare Maxwell*

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*The Alexander Technique*

Mike is an amazing guy who loves to travel and build beautiful things out of wood. He is a User Experience Designer (for computer or system users) in NYC and spends many hours a day using a computer. I met him three years ago when he first came for lessons to see if he could help himself recover from a diagnosis of Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. At that time, Mike was angry about how his life was becoming limited by pain. He had a fierce determination to get better even though he is not by nature a physically disciplined person. He is more of a love to skate and have fun sort of person.

Margaret Hallisey (<http://www.thewilliamsburgacupuncturist.com>), a practitioner of Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine and colleague of mine, referred him to me. He was seeing her for help with the pain and numbness in his hands. Margaret was able to help him with the pain, but she saw postural and movement issues that she felt might have been the original cause of his problem. Mike was also doing yoga and stretches given to him by a physical therapist, but was beginning to be frightened about the continuing loss of sensation in his hands. He trusted Margaret and so he was willing to take her advice. It was a last ditch attempt to see what could be done before having surgery, which his hand surgeon actually did not recommend.

Mike told me during his first lesson that his hands were starting to go numb for long periods of time. He didn't know whether this was because of carpal tunnel syndrome or an old neck injury that was affecting the nerves of his arms. His frustration began to fade as he learned about the design and functioning of his own body on a practical level. The listening hands that are used in an Alexander lesson began to give him a new framework for his own movement patterns. His kinesthetic experience expanded to include his whole body, instead of just the problem areas. He got immediate though temporary relief from the numbness and pain. He would come in with pain at a level 6 (10 being the worst he had ever known) and leave with pain at a level 0.

There was a lot Mike didn't know about how his body works despite many doctor visits and much physical therapy. There was even more that he didn't know about how he was actually moving because it had become habitual and many patterns were below the level of his awareness. He couldn't afford to come every week, so he came every other week, which meant that progress was slow. He would often ask me how to "do it on his own" and I told him in the beginning that he just needed to let me help him, that because of the strength of some of his unconscious movement patterns, "doing it on his own" might actually be making things worse. Gradually, as he learned how to move without the

characteristic slump and downward pull in his spine that he was so used to, I gave him simple things to do while refusing to shorten his spine: lying on his back and moving his legs and arms easily, or doing the stretches that his physical therapist had given him. Our work expanded to include an awareness of the excessive use of force while stretching his hands that had become so familiar. That habitual sensation of “stretch” is actually damaging to our joints and traumatic to our muscles and connective tissue. As he found more relief from the pain, Mike learned about those underlying structures that were being compressed and jammed, but not felt – because the pain was over-riding other sensations.

He learned that he didn't have to work hard to get better. He just had to work differently.

Periodically during the first year of our work together Mike would also check in with his doctor to make sure that the carpal tunnel, the passageway for the nerves that supply sensation and motor control to the hands, had not become narrower or inflamed. Two years after we first started working together the numbness was gone, but Mike would still experience pain during times of stress or high demand at work. It became clear that unless he gave his body time to heal, further progress would not be made. Mike made the difficult but courageous choice to work part time – three days a week instead of five – in order to give his hands time to heal. He kept coming for his lessons even so.

Three years later, the pain in Mike's hands is gone, he has found a better less stressful job, and he works as many hours as he needs to. He has clearly changed more than “just” his body – through the process of re-claiming his physicality, he has chosen also to change external conditions in his life. We continue to discover new connections in his thinking and moving that help him use his arms more easily and freely, and he is developing more strength, length, and width in his back to support the freedom in his arms and legs. He is still interested in the Alexander Technique because it continues to make him feel better, but the original problem that brought him to my studio has been resolved. He has shaped changed from being in a perpetual curved slouch to having a longer, beautifully curvy spine, a much wider range of movement, and has gained about an inch in height from the expansion that has occurred. That extra inch has given his nerves the space they needed to heal.

*Clare Maxwell, dancer/choreographer/educator, has a private Alexander Technique teaching practice and is on the faculty of the William Esper Acting Studio and Movement Research in NYC. She has taught the technique at dance festivals, in hospitals, on training courses, for old folks, for actors, dancers, and musicians, and for people living with disabilities of various sorts. She completed her training in the Alexander Technique at ACAT/NYC in 2000 and certified with Jessica Wolf in The Art of Breathing in 2010. She also uses the Dart Process (a form of developmental movement) as a way of exploring the Alexander Technique principles. Clare wants to help students improve their health and wellbeing; give them tools to overcome anxiety, injury, and pain; and to discover with them the presence of under-utilized movement potential and coordination so that they can excel in all their endeavors.*

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The Complete Guide to the Alexander Technique: <http://www.alexandertechnique.com>