

The Franklin Method®: A Revolutionary Approach to Movement
By Rosalind Gray Davis

Inner IDEA: IDEA Fitness Journal talks with the method's creator, Eric Franklin.



“The Franklin Method does not teach a set of exercises. It teaches how any movement can become a beneficial exercise if performed with good function. This is why I start with the most fundamental things we do all the time . . . everyday activity such as walking, sitting, standing. Because when we become good at the fundamentals, we become better at life.”

*—Eric Franklin,
creator of the Franklin Method*

Eric Franklin believes that a person's physical habits and mental attitudes are the key to living a long, happy and healthy life. His work embodies true mind-body principles that can be incorporated into most lifestyles and exercise modalities. He developed his method by employing a combination of practical experience, scientific and anatomical analysis and personal insight. His unique style is now embraced worldwide by a variety of health and fitness professionals.

At the core of Franklin's work is the use of experiential anatomy, education and imagery. His teaching includes (1) functional, effective movement; (2) an educational process that embodies optimal movement taught in a simple, joyful manner that everyone can understand; and (3) the mind-body tools (imagery) used in the process.

“The Franklin Method is about better coordinating the hidden strengths of the body and creating the basis for efficient and gentle movement,” he explains. “Its aim is not only to improve what

we have, but to improve what we can become through changing structures, so that we can feel and move more harmoniously. It is not what you do from time to time for the body, but what you do habitually, that determines your fitness. Time spent in the gym or at sports should be a continuation of a daylong awareness of one's body and its fitness," he says.

For more than 20 years, Eric Franklin has worked as a successful dancer, choreographer, educator and author. He earned his bachelor of science degree from the University of Zurich and his bachelor of fine arts degree from New York University's (NYU) Tisch School of the Arts. He has studied and trained with leading movement and imagery specialists, including André Bernard (who taught Ideokinesis, a discipline that uses images to improve muscle patterns, at NYU).

Director of the Franklin Method Institute® in Switzerland, Franklin has taught at NYU's School of the Arts as well as The Royal Ballet School and the Laban Center in London. Adherents to his method include the Juilliard School's dance division (in New York), the Music Conservatory of Vienna, the Royal Danish Ballet, Cirque du Soleil and China's Guangdong Modern Dance Company, as well as notables in the fields of Pilates, Gyrotonic® exercise, the Feldenkrais Method®, yoga, and physical and sports therapy.

Last September at the 2009 Inner IDEA® Conference held at La Quinta Resort & Club in Palm Springs, California, Franklin granted *IDEA Fitness Journal* a rare interview.



Participants respond to cues in Eric Franklin's "Pelvic Power for Core Integration" workshop.

Changing the Paradigm

Franklin, who has bright, dancing eyes, an infectious smile and boundless energy, explained how he was inspired to create his method: "I had a background in science and two university degrees, one in sports and scientific education and one in dance. I believed that dancing was healthy, and I loved to do it, but the result was that I had aches and pains throughout my body."

Seeking solutions, Franklin asked himself, “How can something that is fundamentally very good for you cause these kinds of problems?” Traditional movement techniques offered inadequate help, and so he chose to look beyond them. Broadening the existing paradigm, he designed a new approach incorporating an extensive range of mind-body principles.

“I started where movement starts, and that’s in the brain. If you want to change your body, first change your mind. The pictures and the words in our minds influence the feelings in our bodies, which in turn feed our thoughts and mental pictures. The whole purpose of having a brain is to help your body react and respond to what you want and need,” he said.

He began asking the question: Is exercise healthy? The answer, he believes, depends on how you do the exercises that you choose to do. “There is a famous adage, ‘Practice makes perfect.’ But in reality, it is ‘Practice makes permanent whatever you are practicing.’ So, if you are practicing with crooked alignment, you strengthen your crookedness; if you practice negative thinking, you get better at negative thinking; and tense exercising promotes tense posture and breathing,” he explains. Another adage Franklin abhors is “Use it or lose it.” As he puts it, “In reality it should be ‘Use it badly and lose it even faster.’”



Franklin introduces humor into a healthy-spine workshop at the 2009 Inner IDEA Conference.

Four Steps to Enjoying Your Body

In his workshops, Franklin says, he helps people discover their base movement potential and their base mind potential. “I think one of the main purposes of assisting people with movement is to help them enjoy life in their own bodies more. This is the only body we have, and there isn’t going to be a replacement.”



The Franklin Method uses visualization and props to teach proper alignment and function. Here Eric Franklin uses balloons to help Laura Hames, a certified instructor of the method, gently lift the top of her head and hands to signal the brain to release tension in the upper back and neck.

He delineates four steps to help people achieve this goal. First, he says, “establish a baseline. Where are you starting from? You need to be honest with yourself. For example, if you don’t feel good, that’s your baseline. This will, at least, give you information on what to do next.” Second, make a plan; for example, “I need better alignment or shoulder release, or I need to work on my breathing.” Third, assemble resources to make the plan work. By resources Franklin means not just types of movement but also “mental resources, such as imagery, self-talk, self-touch and emotional input, using mood words (e.g., ‘Feel the sunshine saturate your body like a warm bath’).” Fourth, after assembling the necessary resources, take action in order to get results. “Notice the results,” he says, “and, if you like them, integrate them into your body image. If you do not, adjust your plans to create better results.”

Student-Centered Teaching

The Franklin Method advocates student-centered teaching. “The job of the teacher is not to tell the student what to do, because people are being told what to do all the time. If they knew what to do, they’d be doing it. So your job is to be immanent in [your clients’ nervous systems] by helping the clients to discover within themselves their own best cues—because a cue that works for the teacher may or may not hit home with a student.”

In certain cases, Franklin says, clients are already tense, trying to do and understand movements that are over their heads. “If they can’t do what you ask them to do, there are usually two reactions; either they feel incapable or they feel that you are not a person who can help them. And, if you are not helpful, then, they feel, you are not a good teacher.” He adds that most experienced teachers know that if they are not communicating well with a client, they need to

switch their process. But it is critical for a good teacher to understand how information is transferred in movement education.

Franklin believes educators must step back from the cues they use and from the choreography of their particular method and say, “Okay, what can this exercise do? Can it do something that is beneficial for this client?” Movement educators, he says, need to inform and cue people based on what is actually happening in their bodies. As he puts it, “Anatomy itself will not help anyone move better. Otherwise every MD would be a fabulous dancer. If you want to use anatomy to help movement, it needs to be embodied.”



Franklin Method props and imagery can be either anatomical or metaphorical.

For example, says Franklin, it is not enough for clients to know what body part they are working on (e.g., vertebrae, pelvis, scapulae); you must help them visualize that area in the body. “Can your clients see the design [of a body part]? Do they know the purpose of this design, and based on the purpose of the design, [do they know how to] use it in the most efficient way possible so it can do what it is made to do?” He says once you help clients understand these concepts, then you can introduce appropriate cues. “In the Franklin Method, you are creating a process where the student is telling the teacher the truth about the design and function of his body. If the student is empowered, he’ll learn,” he says.

Franklin believes that the larger the teacher’s imagery repertoire, the more effective he or she can be in communicating the proper movement and mental processes to the student. One of the skills of an effective educator, he says, is not just to impart an image to the client but also to see whether it is creating a proper felt response. Franklin’s own students learn new ways to share this kind of information to help their clients and themselves function better in their own bodies. (See the sidebar “Releasing the Shoulders Using Imagery” for one example of how Franklin uses images.) “In the Franklin Method, your teaching becomes a wellness process for yourself, too. You can really only teach it if you are doing it yourself. Not only do you learn many more tools to help your clients embody their best function both mentally and physically, but [you also learn] many more tools for enjoying your life as a teacher.”

For information on Franklin Method workshops and teacher-training courses, contact www.franklinmethod.com.

SIDEBAR: Releasing the Shoulders Using Imagery

The Franklin Method distinguishes between biological and metaphorical imagery. The former relates directly to the anatomical, or real, body. In the latter, the body is transformed metaphorically to create a more comprehensive experience for the student.

As Franklin explains in his latest book, *Beautiful Body, Beautiful Mind* (Princeton Book Co. 2009), “If you imagine your lungs expanding and contracting with each breath, you are using a biological, or to be more precise, anatomical image. If you are imagining the lungs to be sponges that are expanding and contracting, the image is metaphorical, and since it is still very close to the real function, it is anatomically equivalent or related.” He says that metaphorical imagery is often helpful to people unfamiliar with human anatomy.

In the following example, Franklin uses imagery to facilitate muscular relaxation:

“Place your right hand on the left shoulder (arm in front), near your neck (trapezius). Make small circles with the left shoulder, keeping in mind that the shoulder is 70% water. Water is fluid, so make the circles as if watching water ebb and flow in response to the movement. This is an example of anatomical imagery, imagery that parallels actual circumstance. Now circle the shoulder in the other direction, noticing that your breathing is becoming progressively more peaceful.

“With the right hand in the same place on the relaxed shoulder, gently squeeze the muscles with the fingers as if squeezing a sponge. Imagine all tension in the shoulder being squeezed out through this sponge. Now release the fingers and then the entire hand. Slowly let go of the ‘sponge’ and imagine water flowing back as it is reabsorbed, while the ‘muscle sponge’ fills out, spreads and widens. This is a metaphorical image, with the sponge as a metaphor for relaxing the muscles. Repeat three times. Compare shoulders. Stretch and move your arms, noticing the difference between the left and right shoulders. Repeat on the other side.”

SIDEBAR: Franklin Aphorisms for Life and Health

- Become an expert at what you do often: breathing, thinking, sitting, walking.
- You’re not just teaching your actions; you are also teaching your state of being.
- If you are not conscious of your behavior, you can’t change your behavior.
- Attention is the beginning of change.
- Listen to your body, and it will listen to you.
- Embodying function improves function.
- Balanced mobility creates stability.
- If something is not working, make a different choice.
- You don’t get what you want; you get what you do.
- First see in your mind what you want to experience in your life.
- The best image is the one that discovers you.

- Flexibility is an image.
- Match the metaphor to the mechanics.
- To activate the core, release the periphery.
- Build strength into the desired movement patterns.
- Don't solve problems; experience solutions.

Rosalind Gray Davis is a freelance writer based in Carmel, California. An award-winning author, journalist and media consultant for more than 25 years, she currently specializes in writing about health, wellness and fitness topics.

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