



Stimulating the Body to Heal Itself Emotionally

**Tom McCarthy interviewing
Devaraj Sandberg**



Tom McCarthy

I think you are going to love our next guest. His name is Dev Sandberg and he's a bioenergetic therapist and we've just been having the most interesting chat prior to us actually hitting record here. His work is something that I've been fascinated with. Someone recommended it to me. I got his book, I've been doing some of the exercises. Also, he has a YouTube channel that we'll talk about later today, but sitting at my Zoom or even standing at my Zoom which I'm doing right now, I'm on so many Zooms this past year and I was finding my neck and shoulders were cramping up and he had some great exercises or almost therapy that he showed on the YouTube channel that I was able to use and it just made everything feels so great. So Dev, welcome. I think you have so much to add to people today. I really appreciate you being on. Thank you for being here.

Devaraj Sandberg

Thank you, Tom. Thank you so much for inviting me. It's a beautiful event.

Tom McCarthy

So we're gonna get into bioenergetics and some different things that people can learn about that and maybe even a couple of exercises they can do maybe you can even show us a couple of things. But I want to go back to what we were talking about earlier. This isn't something that you learned when you were 10 years old. As a matter of fact, your early life was very different from what you're doing now. So tell us just in a couple minutes about your journey to discovering the power of bioenergetics. How did that come about?

Devaraj Sandberg

Well, I mean, I was born in the early '60s in the UK and I was an adopted kid, I was mixed race. There was a lot of bad stuff going on in the family. I was in hospital quite a lot and died a few times. I was from a very traumatized background basically, just high levels of trauma. And really what happened was when I left school, I mean I just dropped out pretty quick.



I had a job for a couple of years and then I just, I dropped out. I kind of lived at street level, squatting, I was involved in crime and dodgy things and was just generally a kind of no do well, waste, very low self-esteem, heavily reliant on alcohol and to a limited degree of drugs. At some point in my 30s, I straightened up a little bit for a while and kind of got a job in construction and this kind of thing and trained a little bit as an electrician and it wasn't really until my late 30s that it somewhere just became clear to me inside that I wasn't happy, that I totally wasn't happy and that if, I was like a little baby just being born, I would not have chosen this, I would not have chosen to be like this. It wasn't like I was weeping and in a lot of feelings, it was just a very clear kind of realization. It was so clear. I just knew I have to change, I have to change. So I kind of had the idea what I need to do is therapy.

And I'd had this idea somewhere in the back of my mind, like my whole life has been a mess and all I've done is avoid things and one day I'm gonna have to deal with it, but for now I'm not gonna deal with it. And I just thought, okay, now I have to start to deal with my past and to get help and to get support and to see. And so I was back in London and I was looking around for therapists and I didn't know anything about therapy at all and I started to go to do some group therapy with a chap in old street, which is a little bit of East Central London. And that was pretty good. And I met some kind of different people who were a bit more open and a bit different from my kind of druggy criminal friends and stuff and that was nice, but I kind of had a feeling like it's not really gonna reach me.

It's gonna take a long, long time. I've come from this very hardened background where I've closed myself off, I have a lot of defenses from my body whatever and just my mind and I need something a bit more kind of strong. And so I started looking around again and I got a bit of a connection to the Osho people who were, Osho was a mystic from the '70's and '80s, very controversial character, but one of the things that happened around him was a lot of therapists who were interested in changing the world or innovative stuff came together under Osho. And then that energy was also, there was a kind of energy around there where if you wanted to be part of the gang, sanyassins they called them, you had to do a lot of therapy and you had to really look at yourself and you had to go on this kind of deep journey. So there was this whole different sort of strata of peer pressure going on with this thing. And I got a bit sucked into this thing and it was also quite cheap and there was also like, I was kind of desperate to find a new partner at the time and there were a lot of nice women on the groups and stuff. And so I just jumped into the Osho scene.



And at some point I met a chap called Resh, who was an American therapist, black American therapist, and living in Holland running a center. And when I met this guy, he just seemed so kind of streetwise. He was an ex-drug user himself. And I thought you cannot kid this guy, you cannot kid him. Most therapists, I can kid them. I've got enough, I can speak enough stories about all the bad stuff that happened in my childhood, everybody's gonna say poor baby, they're gonna give me an easy time, you know? But this guy, you cannot fool this guy. So I ended up doing a lot of work with him and his institution in Holland and at some point I kind of set out on my own to be a therapist. I was also living in an Osho center for a long time in the UK. And yeah, what I initially trained in was group therapy and with a lot of emotional aggression, screaming and shouting and putting it out, everybody went crazy and the feelings and stuff. And at some point as I started to move out of spiritual community and that kind of thing, I wanted to get back into the city. I'd lived in London and out of London, I was now living in, I was coming to Brighton, which is this nice city in the south of the UK. And I was looking for some therapy that I could teach or give or some way of making money. And I realized that screaming and shouting wasn't so popular anymore and it's hard to do in an urban environment because people will call the cops from next door and stuff. I'd done quite a lot of bioenergetics whilst I was training as a therapist with some Brazilian guys. And I just thought, I'm gonna pick that up and just start learning and teaching more and that developed into me making a YouTube channel about it and learning more about it.

Tom McCarthy

That's awesome. No, your YouTube channel is amazing. And I love something you said. You said at some point, I realized that if I was a child born into this, I wouldn't have chosen this, right? Which I think a lot of people have, if they think about where they are in their lives sometimes, there's certain aspects of their life, they go, hey, wait a minute, what? Why am I still accepting this? I wouldn't have asked for this. I wouldn't have been born into this. So tell us about bioenergetics and the power of what it can do for people that are struggling right now, either with something in their body, in their mind, a health issue, chronic issues. What is bioenergetics? Just explain on a high level what that is to people right now.

Devaraj Sandberg

Yeah I mean it's a body movement therapy that was developed originally really by, well



Wilhelm Reich, Who was like a student of Sigmund Freud, a famous original psychotherapist back in the early 20th century and Reich in the '20s began to work with clients by getting their body to move and by changing their breathing patterns and by getting them to move around. And he kind of ended up leaving Europe to flee the Nazis and stuff and settled in New York or in America anyway. And he picked up American students, one of whom was called Alexander Lowen. And Lowen basically took some of Reich's work, added his own kind of interpretation and called it bioenergetics. So in the west, that's where it's kind of coming from. But it's also a lot of, there's a lot of, in Latin America, they would claim different kind of sources or Shamanic spiritual sources and this kind of thing. So it's one of these things. It's not really clear where it came from, but it was Alexander Lowen who developed the term. And all it really is is putting your body into a certain posture, a stress posture, and then instead of kind of contracting and waiting for it to end, trying to breathe and open and remain feeling your body. So this is kind of, it's kind of simple. It's more useful for psychological stuff than physical stuff in my experience personally. So you know I mean, and my way, my slant on it is quite strongly belly centered. So I'm trying for most clients to bring more awareness into their bellies so they can feel their belly more. It seems like once you get more feeling in the belly, then the upper body can start to relax a little bit. Often we go to therapy with tension or a problem understandably to try and relax those muscles, but sometimes what we need is just to bring the whole center of gravity lower. So you're putting the body into a, yes.

Tom McCarthy

Yeah well and when we work with the psychology, 'cause stress is such a huge factor even in the physical illnesses, when you work with the psychology and you're able to release things that you've been holding onto, you tend to heal, not just psychologically, but also physically. One of the things that, interesting way you have of describing it, you call the body is almost like a dumping ground for trauma and unexpressed feelings. Why is that and how does it show up in people? When you call it like the dumping ground of trauma and unexpressed feelings, how does that show up?

Devaraj Sandberg

Well, I mean from Reich originally, he would look at people's posture basically and then he would like at their kind of personality. So you have body shape, personality, and you've map



that back to classic forms of very early trauma really. So you have, essentially you have, and what he isolated was four key kind of trauma types. And one was very early on. I mean the term we'd use now would be dissociation. Even in the womb, if your body, if your nervous system which is only developing then registers a feeling of unsafety, it can seem to be able to direct when it's out of the body. This is basically dissociation. And so once that pattern is set up, either in the womb or in the first years of life, then the person whenever they feel unsafe, and they may not even be consciously aware of it, they tend to start to dissociate and to come up into just a thinking world or an abstract world somewhere, something like that. Another classic wound is what he would term the oral wound, which is when you don't have connection with your mother in the first year of life, physical connection, or just affection, energy being given to, because I guess as mammals and if you look at kind of early human tribes, there's a very strong bond for the first year, sometimes a bit longer, between the mother and the child.

And I think the expectation of that is kind of written into our genes somewhere. So when we don't quite get that as a kid growing up for the first year, it tends to leave a trace of a sense of inner lack, almost like no matter what happens, I'm never gonna get enough. This is an oral wounding. And that's a strong pattern. The inner world is kind of empty or the dissociative inner world is more fearful. The next kind of thing that can manifest is the enduring pattern when, because the next major life event in infancy is when we start to, we get access to the word no basically around the age of two. And prior to that, if our mom wants to go down the shops, she's just pushing us down the shops and we're just going along and then at age two, suddenly it's like no and you can scream and shout and protest about it.

And of course little kids need boundaries, but if the parents come down really strong on the child and seek to just completely subjugate that no, that's that early ego as it's developing, then you create a personality who's gonna endure a life as survival training, who will complain and grumble, but will never really step up because they're just trying to get through the day. And they're in a world which is filled more with angst and anger which is suppressed. And then you have the rigid personality which is Reich's last one which really is someone who kind of, a little bit later on in infancy, maybe four, five, six, seven, just learns the rules. The parents kind of train them, you get affection when you behave good and you get punishment when you behave bad in quite a strong way this training.



And so they tend to be very focused on performance, very focused on hierarchical structures and how to move up them and this kind of thing. And they shut off their inner world, they rigidify their body to shut off their inner world of feelings because they don't feel safe with feeling. What's important to them is performance and looking good in the world.

Tom McCarthy

That's interesting. So I know people are probably listening to this going, okay, now I understand why I'm feeling. Does everyone have trauma and unexpressed feelings? I mean is that pretty universal?

Devaraj Sandberg

Yeah, I mean in modern world, we kind of think of trauma, the average person on the street would probably think of trauma basically as a few people who had something really bad happen to them, like losing a parent when they're a kid or some abuse or something like that. But in reality, most people have quite a high level of this stuff going on, but we're just trying to be functional. And these strategies that I just explained are really just safety strategies. All we're trying to do is stay safe. But what happens is as we develop, probably if we were animals, we would release this trauma from the body. It's held in the body as tension or dead zone in the muscle system, and we would release it, but we kind of develop this ego and it's like, well, I'll release it next week or something. And then we just forget about it and we're in denial and then we're just going through life. So it's like kind of a bug in the human psyche almost, like the coding, you know?

Tom McCarthy

Yeah, no. So we want to let go, but we tend to want to cling to the past too, right? Yeah, okay good. So you talk about embodiment. Explain what embodiment means.

Devaraj Sandberg

Well embodiment to me is like actually just really inhabiting my body, feeling the body basically to the maximum I can. I've been very dissociated in my time and even still doing a lot of therapy, I'll often get feedback that I'm still out of my body too much, you know? And



at some point, I would fight the feedback of course at first, but like at some point I became really interested, how can I occupy my body? How can I be present in my body?

Tom McCarthy

Yeah and how does that relate to healing? When you become more present in your body, how does that help you heal?

Devaraj Sandberg

I mean I think that in many ways, one core of healing is being able to just fully feel your body and being just present in the moment with someone or present with the situation. And the action of slowly coming back in and reoccupying, you kind of clear up any stored charge from trauma in the past. And so you still have emotional reactions to anything that's going on around you, but they're more relevant to what's really happening. Whereas someone who's got a lot of charge in the body from the past, may overreact or completely under-react to a stimuli, like they've got a big charge of anger in the past, their parents squashed them a lot as a little kid emotionally and then at work a very small thing goes on, someone jumps in front of him for the photocopier and they go into a huge overreaction almost, it's just a charge inside or they do nothing and swallow it all down because there's a fear of the anger. So when you become more present in your body, that is a healing thing then. Yeah, you have natural emotions to what's going on around you, but they're relevant and appropriate to the moment.

Tom McCarthy

Yeah, this is really, really cool stuff. Like a lot of people don't understand the power of what you're talking about because it's not a gadget you're using on yourself or a pill you're taking, but the ability to come into your body and release this trauma and unexpressed feelings is so healing and it frees up energy. I mean right now, when you have this trauma, it's trapping energy, you're not totally free, our unexpressed feelings, they're trapping energy. It's keeping the healing process, the physical and the mental healing process, from really just working the way that we were born to have it work. Now something you said is that 99% of people aren't breathing correctly. They're breathing in a way that locks them in their past, in their bodies. So explain that, 99%, that's pretty much everybody. What are they doing with their breathing or maybe even I'm doing it too potentially. What are people doing with their breathing that is locking them in the past?



Devaraj Sandberg

Well, when you look at mammals, like other members of our evolutionary past, what you notice is kind of, they breathe with their belly muscles basically. It's like, obviously we don't have lungs down in the belly, but when you deliberately push your abdomen out, like ballooning it out which we're kind of taught as young people not to do that because it doesn't look cool, but when you do that, it draws the lungs down a bit. And if your throat is relaxed, air will just come in 'cause it's like creating a bit of a vacuum, the air comes in. And then if you relax your abdomen and then compress it a little bit, the air just gets pushed out again. And so really we should be breathing from the belly. This is how an animal when it's relaxed will breathe. You can see it. If you watch a dog lying on its belly, you'll just see it's belly moving up and down. It's breathing from the belly with a relaxed throat. But how most humans have learned to breathe is kind of sucking air in at the throat and using a lot of what physiologists call the accessory muscles of respiration, like the scalene and the sternocleidomastoid muscles around here and the pecs and the trapezoid.

So we're using all those muscles to kind of breathe as well. And really it should just be the abdominals and to be fair also the intercostals around in between the ribs. Those are the muscles that from our lineage as mammals, as primates, we should be using to breathe with. But what happens is we're kind of, we're in a state of slight anxiety and fear, and we're constantly kind of just almost buzzing with energy around the throat because we're keeping these muscles a bit tight and tense, we're sucking air in, like we don't really trust our primate past to breathe for us. We don't really trust it. And so as a human, we're like, okay, I kind of trust it, but obviously breathing is a massively important moment by moment process. We try and keep a little bit of control over it unconsciously. So even though breathing is a completely unconscious process in most people, when they're kind of, someone just studies them breathing, and this is more mainstream science now actually with medical doctors who treat chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, COPD, asthma, a lot of it is about, and also with some of these conditions, like long COVID or fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue, sometimes getting people to breathe with the belly is very useful to start to reduce the load on the muscles here, which is getting overloaded.

Tom McCarthy

Yeah, that's interesting because even as you were talking, I started doing what you were just talking about, breathing more, and I've always, I breathe through my nose and I've



taught myself to do that many years ago and use the belly, but the way you said it was interesting because I still, I still as I was noticing the way I was breathing, I was still kind of sucking up here even though my belly was going out. And then when I just tried using the belly as just the tool to just let air come in, it was awesome. So thank you. That was really, really cool. And I hope a lot more people will do that, right? Because that does create a lot of stress up there. I think that's probably something that I've been doing, even though I thought I'm breathing right, and I wasn't. I wasn't letting the belly be the source of just letting air enter. I was still kind of breathing it down into the belly, which is stressing up here. So that was really great, I love it. Let's talk about, let's talk about releases that people can do. And what does a release feel like? How long does it take using bioenergetics? You've got such great information in your books, on your YouTube channel, exercises like for neck and shoulders, I did that one. I also did the one for the face and jaw. That was really great. I did that for several days. How long does it take to really, and maybe it varies? Maybe depending upon the trauma or how deep the repressed feeling is, but when people do buyer bioenergetics, what does a release feel like and how long typically does it take for them to get a nice release?

Devaraj Sandberg

I mean it is very variable as you say. It's hard to kind of predict exactly. Some people when they start will get quite a powerful experience. And that can be that their body goes into some form of spontaneous shaking and later on, they just feel lighter, something like that. It could even be a sensation of heat or something like that. It can almost be like, almost going into an altered state sometime or something like that, like a strong contraction in the body almost, and the body's kind of spasming itself and then . Other times, it's much more subtle and you just feel a bit more open afterwards. Sometimes people burp a lot or something like that. Sometimes it comes out the lower end of it, air.

It's kind of hard to put a real figure on it. I guess for people get into it, probably in realistic terms have a bit of a release early on and that motivates them to keep going with it. Like one course I run online these days is a 52 week course. And that's a long course, you know, which for most people will go on a couple of years. It's a huge roller coaster for people doing it. There'll be phases when you're super turned onto it and you're really up for it and you're like, yeah, I can't wait to do my bio. And other times when your mind is just in total resistance, you completely don't want to do it and you've got at least 17 good reasons why



you shouldn't continue. It's a challenging process. It's a challenging process. So over the longer term, developing some level of discipline is a definite part of it and developing some level of kind of like awareness where you start to distrust some of your own mind stories is also useful. But it does vary from person to person. Some people have a huge release and then of course you try and repeat that and it doesn't always repeat. It's hard to know exactly.

Tom McCarthy

Where do people start? Do they start where they're feeling the most tension typically or do you have any recommendations on that? And then maybe you can even give us a little sample of what this might look like for maybe neck and shoulders or something like that, just a little bit of a sample. But where does somebody start with this work? They can go through your 52 week class, that probably takes them through the whole body, or they can buy your book. If they buy your book, where do they start? Do they pick like one area of the body that they notice a lot of tension or what do you recommend?

Devaraj Sandberg

I mean, you can. I generally recommend people to start with the bow and arch postures and I also recommend them to start with this kind of belly breathing thing which feeds into it which I only really learned properly in the last year to be honest. That's what I recommend for people. And then ideally you don't want to pick and choose too much. Ideally, you want to try and create a bit of format for yourself and then stick to it, create something that's practical for you that you can commit to and try and stick to it over time and just monitor if it's doing good for you. Ideally, what you want to be able to create is more grounding and more openness basically. That's what the main objectives are on a sort of psychological level so that you come out of the session and 10 minutes later, you feel more grounded, okay, I'm connected to the ground and I've got energy, you know, I feel resilient. And there's an openness. You can approach people from this kind of I'm okay, you're okay perspective, basic psychological health. You haven't got a frame in the person, an expectation, you're just open to them, they're open to you. But you've got this groundedness. So if anything dodgy goes on in the interaction, you can still put some boundaries up or that kind of thing on some level.



Tom McCarthy

Yeah, you know it's crazy. Growing up, I didn't have quite the childhood you had, but my dad passed away when I was very young and so there was some trauma and stress, but I just, I was kind of holding it all in, not noticing it for so many years. And then just discovering, wow I really am, I'm kind of holding this tension and this trauma in in ways that now I can feel. Like when you really start to have this awareness that you had in your 30s and 40s and I had probably maybe in my 40s, maybe a little bit later than you, it is amazing to release it. So can you give us maybe an exercise or two if we're experiencing maybe some, everyone's been on their computers and working, working virtual now and kind of not moving quite as much. So maybe a couple things we can do just to get rid of some of this using bioenergetics, a little tester for us, yeah.

Devaraj Sandberg

Yeah, let's just try and look at a few couple of postures or something. Can you see me okay?

Tom McCarthy

Yeah, I can see you good, yeah.

Devaraj Sandberg

Okay. So a great posture to practice belly breathing, you can also practice it lying down which is really good but from standing, with your feet about shoulder width or a little bit wider and the outsides of your feet roughly parallel, your knees a little bent so your ass an kind of come down a little bit, and just try and relax with your eyes open looking straight ahead and try to kind of feel into your throat and your belly and deliberately balloon your belly out whilst relaxing your throat to try and create a natural inhale. And then reverse that to create an exhale, taking about two or three seconds for each element of that. Something like that. So kind of really trying to feel the belly and feel the throat. And then I'm usually working with a ding track. You can download ding tracks and you can find something that puts a ding in the background. And then after a minute or two, you can come into something like the bow posture, which is one of the foundational postures of bioenergetics where you keep your lower body just as it was right now and then you bring your arms right up with your palms facing forwards.



And then you squeeze your arms backwards and press your pelvis forwards and just keep looking straight ahead and keep trying to do this belly breathing with a relaxed throat. And just continue with that for one ding. And in these postures, you know, with like the bow, you don't have to get it right like you would in a yoga class. It's more like you just got to push in the right places, and then you're doing it right for your body type. And then the size of the shoulders, I'll kind of do it more oblique, same with your lower body, same, and you've got to keep those knees bent because we tend to lock the knees when we're holding things off. We can just pull the shoulders up towards the ears.

And if you want to make it more intense, you can open your jaw wide as well like a teenager trying to eat, kind of like. And then continue with this belly breathing. We'll do both. You don't have to do the jaw stretch as well. But the main thing is to really try and keep those shoulders up as high as you can for the whole ding of a minute or two. So you continue with this for a minute or so. And then just to complete it, we can do the arch posture, which is just bringing your feet closer together, like six, eight, 10 inches apart, and then from standing, just dropping your chin to your chest and slowly hanging forwards like your head is really heavy. And once you're down, ideally keep your eyes open, keeping your arms and your head a little bit to relax your neck and your shoulders and keep breathing with your belly. And then when the ding goes, come up and you can do like another rep. And one of the things you notice from this is like what we're doing to kind of release stress is actually creating more stress. Like people with tense shoulders, if you tell them to pull your shoulders up, making it worse.

Tom McCarthy

I'm already doing that, yeah.

Devaraj Sandberg

But if you do that and you keep your knees a little bent and you keep breathing with your belly, at some point, your, because what's happening to the shoulders, they've got all these holding patterns in them which really is just like regular muscles, the muscles become contorted in a certain way. And by really overstretching them, we start to break that open. So the muscle starts to actually sort of vibrate at some point and some kind of release can happen.



Tom McCarthy

That's awesome. Yeah, that's great. Well you've just given people, including me, a nice little routine to work on there. So thank you so much for that. And I know that there's so much more that you can offer people. Where can people find out more about what you do and take advantage of bioenergetics?

Devaraj Sandberg

Well, I mean, they could just put into Google Devaraj Bioenergetics, d-e-v-a-r-a-j bioenergetics, and you'll find my YouTube channel and my website. And my website's also called bioenergetics.org.uk. There's some courses there and stuff I'm trying to add to that at the moment, but I also have an awful lot of free content on YouTube. So you can totally dip in and give it a go for free without having to like, just try it before you kind of do anything deeper with it.

Tom McCarthy

Yeah. And you came highly recommended. I just want to let everybody know. So there's a medical doctor here in the US that is an energy healer also. He's an MD, he's a urologist and he through the whole COVID was working, working, working and noticed that he was holding stress in his body and you've helped him out a lot I know. And he was the one that recommended you for this interview. So thank you so much for being on and I encourage everybody to go check out Dev's work and he's got books, he's got 52 week course you can take advantage of. And then as he mentioned, lots of great stuff on YouTube. And the exercises, do you call them exercises? It feels like an exercise. Yeah I mean you almost get like a, when I was doing it the other day, I was sweating a little bit.

It was kinda good, right? It's almost like a physical exercise where you're releasing, but you said you are creating stress on the body and these different things you had me doing with my shoulders, right? And at the end it just felt so much more of a release, you know, letting go. And even though I was like, how can I hold onto this? This feels like what I'm already feeling. And then boom, oh yeah that felt so good. So thank you so much, Dev. It's wonderful being able to talk with you and I know you're gonna, you've helped a lot of people and I know you're gonna help a lot more. And hopefully people watching will go check out your site, again, it's bioenergetics.org.uk.



And they can find out more about all the great things you do and take advantage of it. So thank you so much for being part of this interview and being part of our summit, Dev. We really appreciate you.

Devaraj Sandberg

Thank you, Tom. I really appreciate you, man. You're a beautiful guy and I hope the summit goes really, really great.

Tom McCarthy

Yeah, thank you very much.